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The Golden Age;  
a Study in Romanticism

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THE GOLDEN AGE;  
A STUDY IN ROMANTICISM

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BY

HENRY ALFRED BURD

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THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

Henry Alfred Burd

ENTITLED *The Golden Age, A Study in Romanticism*

BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF *Master of Arts*

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The Golden Age;  
A Study In Romanticism.

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## THE GOLDEN AGE.

### Introduction.

The conception of the golden age is found in the literature of all ages and among all peoples. The mythology of Greece and Rome, the folk lore of antiquity, and the wonder tales of the Hebrews, are all aglow with the golden glory of the past. The life of the early years of the race was heroic in the eyes of the poet, the historian, and the seer, because of their point of view. They stood in the midst of a people more or less degraded and barbarous, and it was natural that they should draw a picture of a time which they considered to be ideally good in contrast to the wickedness of their own time. The vision which they conceived was of a life of pastoral simplicity when men dwelt together without laws and without strife. There was no need of labor, the earth yielded its fruits spontaneously, care and pain were unknown, and death was a sleep. This picture of an existence of innocence and happiness, as it took definite form in the early mythology, was known as the golden age. And it remains today with most of the characteristics with which that mythology endowed it. The original connotation probably had some religious significance, "but long after it had died out as religion it lived on as poetry, retaining its original quality, though the theology contained in it has been forever superseded or absorbed into more spiritual creeds."<sup>1</sup> Some writers<sup>2</sup> hold the religious element to be still

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1. J.A. Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*. Two vols. Third ed. London, 1902. Vol. 1, p. 75.

2. R.W. Browne, *A History of Roman Classical Literature*. London, n.d. p. 248.



dominant and make all allusions to the golden age refer ultimately to the Hebrews. But it is not germane to the present purpose to discover whether the pagan poets were imitating life in the Garden of Eden or whether they were following out one of their own ancient mythical traditions. It is sufficient to know that the idea of the golden age was very widespread and existed generally among the writers of antiquity.

Human nature does not vary within wide limits, nor do changes take place quickly. In certain fundamental essentials humanity is the same yesterday, today, and forever. People in all ages and at all times have had imagination. It has prompted men who were bound down by the monotony of a prosaic life to fancy an existence of unlimited happiness. Wherever there has existed the feeling that life, individual or social, was imperfect and capable of improvement, imagination has created a more tranquil existence, a better and happier community, or an ideal commonwealth. This tendency to seek an ideal, this longing for something better than is actually experienced, is as old as the human race; it has always haunted the mind of man and it will continue to fire his imagination so long as there shall exist an imperfect society.

While the classical poets characterize the life of the golden age with essentially the same features, they are by no means a unit as to its geographical location. With the Hebrews it was the Garden of Eden - wherever that choice bit of earth may be. To the Greek mind it was an Arcadia situated somewhere in the Orient. "Cratinis seems to put it in Sparta; Pherecrates sets forth



### III.

the belief that it is in Persia;"<sup>1</sup> others think of it as in Thessaly. The Latin writers imitated the Greeks, but Virgil entertained the hope that his own native Italy would witness the coming of the second golden age. With all of the writers the feeling of national pride had more or less influence. Each was anxious to put forth his native province as the one that had been so singularly favored by the gods as to be the dwelling place of an ideal race of men.

To the poets of antiquity the golden age was a long lost condition. It had existed somewhere in the all-but-forgotten past, and since that age of innocence and purity mankind had been steadily growing worse. In fact, since that time the human race had passed through three successive ages - silver, bronze, heroic, and into a fourth - iron, the worst of all. While there are hints among the minor writers which vaguely suggest that they may have thought of the golden age as a present or a possible future condition, the general idea, and the only one that is clearly defined, is of a past condition.<sup>2</sup> Virgil is the exception to this rule. He is the great ancient poet who stands alone as prophesying the realization of the golden age in the immediate future.

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1. Ernestus Graf, *Ad Aureae Aetatis Fabulum Symbola*, in *Leipziger Studien*, vol. 8, p. 69. Leipzig, 1885.

2. Ernestus Graf says (64), "It cannot be determined from the comic poets whether they were depicting past conditions, an ideal present or possible future conditions. Cratinis, in *Divitiarum* frg., speaks of it as present; Teleclides, in *Amphictyonibus* frg. I. 4, speaks of a past age; and Crates, in *Feris* frg., speaks of a future condition.





#### IV.

The idea of the present day is just opposite to the prevailing classical tendency. The Greek looked to the past, the modern looks to the future for his golden age. As the ancient saw his age of bliss in the remote past, the modern sees his in the remote future. In either case the remoteness of the scene has much to do in lending to it the glamor of ideality.

" 'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view." I

I have said there was a change of attitude - from the backward look to the forward look. To determine the approximate time and the relative conditions attendant upon that change is one of the problems of the following pages.

Romanticism has been defined as the literature of escape from the present time and place to some other time and place. In this respect the literature dealing with the golden age may be considered as distinctly romantic. The prevailing form of that literature among the classic poets and the eighteenth century imitators was the pastoral. "The conception of a golden age of rustic simplicity does not, indeed, involve the whole world of pastoral literature. It does not account either for the allegorical pastoral in which actual personages are introduced, in the guise of shepherds to discuss temporary affairs, or for the so-called realistic pastoral, in which the town looks on with amused envy at the rustic freedom of the country. What it does comprehend, is that outburst of pastoral song which sprang from the yearning of the tired soul to escape, if it were but in imagination and for a moment, to a life

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I. Thomas Campbell, Pleasures of Hope.



V.

of simplicity and innocence from the bitter luxury of the court and the menial bread of princes."<sup>1</sup>

If romanticism is considered as "the natural attitude of childhood; the pursuit of an ever fleeting will-o'-the-wisp; a form of homesickness, or nostalgia; or the longing for another world,"<sup>2</sup> the golden age literature must be classed as romantic. As "the romance of childhood is the dream with which age consoles itself for the disillusionments of life,"<sup>3</sup> so the golden age is the dream in which the romanticist seeks solace for the heart-aches and disappointments of actual existence. The classical golden age was a dream of the childhood of the race. The poets looked back from the toil and strife of their own time and found comfort in contemplating the simplicity of that primeval existence. The same motive prompted the young romantic poets to revive an interest in the golden age. We shall trace this revival through the eighteenth century and endeavor to point out some of the ways in which it had a bearing on the romantic movement.

It has been seen that the sentiment of the golden age was very wide spread among the ancient poets and that it has existed almost from the beginning. But it is not to be inferred that the dream of a better day was the exclusive property of the poets.

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1. Walter W. Greg, Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama, London, 1906, p.6.

2. Professor Irving Babbitt, lecture on "Meaning of the word Romantic," before English Journal Club, U. of I. Jan. II, 1911.

3. Greg, p.6, n.2.



## VI.

Political philosophers, realizing the imperfections of human institutions, set about to create, in fancy, a new community, an ideal commonwealth. Plato's Republic is a land of ideal justice, wherein each works for the common good of all; in More's Utopia (1516) wisdom is wealth and riches of gold and jewels are despised. These are sufficient to illustrate the early tendency to reconstruct society according to ideal principles. This tendency found its most ardent supporters in the eighteenth century in Jean Jacques Rousseau, Tom Paine, and William Godwin. But these men were influenced by the poetical conception of the golden age as well as by the ideal commonwealths of the philosophers. We are concerned here only with the former. To determine the relationship of the poetical conception of the golden age to the revolt from the established order of government and the consequent founding of a new political gospel, is a third purpose of this study.

There is still another field in which the golden age idea had a very interesting development. Poets advocated a return to the simple, unaffected, rural life; political reformers sought to establish ideal governments; and religious writers prophesied an earthly paradise. Virgil's Fourth Eclogue was written in the last half of the first century B.C. It was a time of great uneasiness among the people. The wars in which Rome had been a principal factor for so long were over, and the beginning of a time of quiet led the people to expect some event which should bring peace and happiness. "The divine revelation which God's people enjoyed



## VII.

taught them to expect the advent of the Messiah."<sup>1</sup> Religious enthusiasts took the Pollio to be a poetical rendition of the prophecies of Isaiah, and saw in it a forecast of the birth of Christ. Their belief seemed to be not wholly without foundation for in a short while the Messiah was born. They looked, then, for a secular kingdom and the temporal triumph of their Leader. They saw, in fancy, the old prophecies literally fulfilled - the wolf dwelling with the lamb, the leopard with the kid, the calf with the lion, the cow with the bear, and the lion eating straw like an ox.<sup>2</sup> But none of these things came to pass. Christ left the earth without having perceptibly changed conditions into a likeness of the mythological golden age. His followers were not to be disheartened by this failure and they set the time for the regeneration of the world at his second coming. Sects of Millenarians sprang up, who said that at the expiration of a thousand years, Christ would return and establish upon the earth a kingdom with all its promised glories. Then happiness and peace should reign supreme, and violence and discord be unknown. But the thousand years passed by without the looked-for developments, and religious writers began to take a new point of view. Instead of prophesying an earthly paradise with Christ as king, they looked forward to a time when all men should recognize a common bond of brotherhood. This is, in general, the attitude of the Christian leader of today. When all men, everywhere, observe the golden rule and deal with each

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1. Browne, p. 249.

2. Isaiah XI. 1-9.





## VIII.

other in the true spirit of brotherhood, then will the golden age have come indeed. This time is placed in the far distant future, and the desired end can be accomplished only through the labor and self-sacrifice of those who recognize their kinship to all the nations of the world. But there is an abiding faith that the goal will ultimately be reached. It can best be expressed in the words of Robert Burns:

For a' that, an' a' that,  
It's coming yet, for a' that,  
That man to man, the world o'er,  
Shall brothers be, for a' that.<sup>I</sup>

In the development of the conception of the golden age from a religious point of view we have a splendid illustration of an ancient idea carried into modern times, and the reconstruction of that idea to meet the new conditions. But this is without the range of the present work and we will be no further concerned with it.

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I. Burns' Complete Poetical Works, Cambridge ed. Boston and New York, 1897. "For a' that, and a' that." p.294.



## Chapter One.

### THE CLASSICAL POETS.

Greek mythology received its historic form from two great poets, Hesiod(9th century B.C.) and Homer(9th century B.C.) It is generally conceded that Hesiod was the first to designate the five Ages of mankind, and to characterize the golden age with those features which remain with it, in large part, today. I shall give Hesiod's conception of the Ages. There will be many future references to the Silver Age, Iron Age, etc., and a characterization of the five divisions now will make these references clear without repetition. This will also aid us in appreciating the poet's point of view, and help us to understand what it meant to him to picture the life of the golden age.

In the Age of Gold Saturn reigned upon the earth and men lived without care, or pain, or old age; death came like a sweet sleep; the earth yielded fruits untilled. After death the spirits were made guardians of mortal men.

"Men spent a life like gods in Saturn's reign,  
Nor felt their mind a care, nor body pain;  
From labor free, they ev'ry sense enjoy;  
Nor could the ills of time their peace destroy;  
In banquets they delight, removed from care;  
Nor troublesome old age intruded there:  
They die, or rather seem to die, they seem  
From hence transported in a pleasing dream.  
The fields, as yet untill'd their fruits afford,  
And fill a sumptuous and unenvy'd board:



Thus, crown'd with happiness their every day,  
Serene and joyful, passed their lives away.

When in the grave this race of men was laid,  
Soon was a world of holy demons made,  
Aërial spirits, by great Jove design'd,  
To be on earth the guardian of mankind;  
Invisible to mortal eyes they go,  
And mark our actions, good or bad, below;  
Th' immortal spies with watchful care preside,  
And thrice ten thousand round their charges glide:  
They can reward with glory or with gold;  
A pow'r they by divine permission hold."<sup>1</sup>

The next age he calls the silver. It is inferior to the first. The race is condemned to a long childhood and a brief maturity, but because the altars were neglected and the gods ignored, Jove, in anger, swept it away. The people were deemed happy after death.

The third age is the brazen. The earth is peopled with a race of monstrous physique. They first eat meat. Their houses and weapons are made of brass. Being so powerful their chief delight is in war, but it proves their undoing, for they perish by mutual slaughter. There is no blissful future life for the race, it died without a name.

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1. Thomas Cooke, The Works of Hesiod translated from the Greek, in Anderson's British Poets, London, 1795, Vol. 13. Works and Days, Bk. I, l. 160ff.



At this stage Hesiod suspends, for a while, the downward procession of the races, and pays his respects to the heroes who fell before Thebes and Troy. This race is better than the one which immediately preceded it. After death the heroes are transported to the islands of the blest where they live a life strikingly similar to that enjoyed on earth during the golden age.

Now comes the iron age, corrupt, degenerate, and toilsome, in which Hesiod conceived himself to be living. In this age, family ties are broken, oaths and vows are not binding; soon modesty and justice will forsake the earth and only woes, evil, hatred, and violence, remain the portion of man.

"O! would I had my hours of life began  
 Before this fifth, this sinful race of man;  
 Or had I not been call'd to breathe the day,  
 Till the rough iron age had pass'd away:  
 For now, the times are such, the gods ordain,  
 That every moment shall be wing'd with pain;  
 Condemn'd to sorrows, and to toil we live;  
 Rest to our labor death alone can give;  
 And yet, amid the cares our lives annoy,  
 The gods will grant some intervals of joy:  
 But how degen'rate is the human state!  
 Virtue no more distinguishes the great;  
 No safe reception shall the stranger find;  
 Nor shall the ties of blood or friendship bind;  
 Nor shall the parent, when his sons are nigh,





Look with the fondness of a parent's eye,  
 Nor to the sire the son obedience pay,  
 Nor look with rev'rence on the locks of gray,  
 But O! regardless of the pow'rs divine,  
 With bitter taunts shall load his life's decline.  
 Revenge and rapine shall respect command,  
 The pious, just, and good, neglected stand.  
 The wicked shall the better man distress,  
 The righteous suffer, and without redress;  
 Strict honesty, and naked truth, shall fail,  
 The perjur'd villian in his arts prevail.  
 Hoarse envy shall, unseen, exert her voice,  
 Attend the wretched, and in ill rejoice.  
 At last fair modesty and justice fly,  
 Rob'd their pure limbs in white, and gain the sky,  
 From the wide earth they reach the blest abodes,  
 And join the grand assembly of the gods,  
 While mortal men, abandon'd to their grief,  
 Suck in their sorrows, hopeless of relief."<sup>1</sup>

After following through the five successive ages, and noticing especially, the despair with which he speaks of his own time, the Iron Age, it is easy to understand why the conception of the golden age had such a charm for Hesiod and for all the poets. The wickedness and violence of his age depressed him, his soul was

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I. Ibid, Bk. I, l. 234ff.



burdened with the lack of reverence among the people, and he turned for solace to that time when all was innocence, quiet, and reverence. The contrast is absolute, and that fact accounts in large measure for the attractiveness which the golden age has always had. J.A.Symonds says: "The Hesiodic conception of felicity . . . . owes its beauty to a sense of contrast between tranquility imagined and woe and warfare actually experienced."<sup>1</sup> And this suggests another element - its beauty. It is the beauty of a poet performing his mission of lifting the soul from the dull and commonplace, to a height whence it may catch a vision of something ennobling and inspiring. But Hesiod gives no inspiration for the future; his vision is of the glory of what has been and is no more; he sees a golden past but only an iron present and future.

The part which Homer played in giving the golden age mythology its historical form was not so great as that of Hesiod. In this respect Homer is most often associated with the thought of the Elysian Plain and Isles of the Blest. Life in the Elysian Plain is very like that in the golden age. The condition of those in Elysium is human and anterior to death; yet it is as a special privilege in substitution for death. He speaks of it thus: "the deathless gods will convey thee to the Elysian Plain and the world's end, where is Ehadamantus of the fair hair, where life

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<sup>1</sup>J.Symonds. vol.I. p.158.



is easiest for men. No snow is there, nor yet great storm, nor any rain; but always ocean sendeth forth the breeze of the shrill west, to blow cool on men."<sup>1</sup>

In his wanderings Odysseus comes into a happy land ruled over by the gracious king Alcinoüs, like an immortal, while his queen weaves beautiful yarn of sea-purple satin. In their palace there is a brightness as of the sun and moon. In their garden the fruit never fails winter or summer, enduring all the year through; pears, apples, grapes, figs, etc., ripen continuously and without grafting or pruning.<sup>2</sup> It reminds one very forcibly of Hesiod's golden age, and it is probably the same mythology with a slightly different interpretation. The essential characteristics are common to both, - a happy land, no labor, no strife, spontaneous production of the necessaries of life.

Theocritus(3rd century B.C.) stands preeminent among pastoral poets. He created the verse form which was imitated by the classical poets in "nature poetry", and which became the vehicle for expressing the sentiment of the golden age among the early eighteenth<sup>1</sup>/<sub>1</sub>imitators. Theocritus was born in the midst of the unchanging nature of Sicily, the nature that, "through all the changes of things, has never lost its sunny charm."<sup>3</sup> He lived

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1. The Odyssey of Homer done into English prose by S.H. Butcher and A.Lang. New York, 1900. Odyssey IV. 563.

2. W.H. Appleton, Greek poets in English Verse. New York. 1893. Odyssey VII, 81-132.

3. Theocritus, Bion and Moscus, trans. by A.Lang. New York. 1896. Introd. XIV.



in the rural districts among the flute-playing shepherds. Every day he saw about him the evidences of rustic bounty - "abundance of food and wine and the repose that sweetens the season of outdoor work."<sup>1</sup> But he was not a stranger to the city. In Syracuse and the other towns of the coast he saw the refined and luxurious manners, the gilded pastimes and hollow pleasures, of the polite society of his day. Then he had only to pass the gates and wander into the country, the golden world of the pastoral. A man of less imagination than the poet would have appreciated the contrast. It is not surprising, then, that Theocritus idealized the life of the shepherds. Their's was the existence which he loved to contemplate, and he built up a happy perfection of life which rivalled that of the mythical golden age. Compare Hesiod's

The fields, as yet untill'd, their fruits afford,  
with this, from the seventh Idyl of Theocritus, "pears at our feet and apples by our sides were rolling plentiful, the tender branches, with wild plums laden, were earthward bowed," and it will be seen that they are alike in freedom from work and in abundance of food. To illustrate another common element I quote from the twelfth Idyl, "An equal yoke of friendship they bore: ah, surely then, there were golden men of old, when friends gave love for love." Then but not now, for men no longer give love for love, instead, envy and jealousy prevail.

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I. W.C.Wright, A short history of Greek Literature. Chicago, 1907. p.428.





The thought of an ideal existence of the race was not confined to the Greeks. Along with the general diffusion of Hellenic culture the conception of the mythical golden age filtered into Latin literature. It found a receptive soil and soon was as generally diffused among the Latins as the Greeks.

Lucretius (98-55 B.C.) is one of the first poets to express the sentiment among the Latins. He saw the lessening fertility of Italy, he noticed the decay of the national character, the increasing weakness of the Roman government, and the formality and mere ritualism of the religious services, and he thought the end of the world was near. He looked back to the beginning of the world and drew a picture of the life as he saw it. Men lived without plowing the earth or pruning the trees; they ate acorns and berries and drank from the running streams; they did not know the use of fire and had no clothes; they dwelt in the forests without laws or customs. This age of man he conceived to be supremely happy in its simplicity, and contrasted that life with the sophistication of his own time. Because it will be referred to again, I will here quote the passage from De Rerum Natura, in which Lucretius characterizes this early life.

"No one then was a sturdy guider of the bent plow or knew how to labor the fields with iron or plant in the ground young saplings or lop with pruning-hooks old boughs from the high trees. What the sun and rains had given, what the earth had produced spontaneously, was guerdon sufficient to content their hearts. Among acorn-bearing oaks they would refresh their bodies



for the most part; and the arbuté-berries which you now see in the winter-time ripen with a bright scarlet hue, the earth would then bear in greatest plenty and of a larger size; and many coarse kinds of food besides the teeming freshness of the world then bare more than enough for poor wretched men. But rivers and springs invited to slake thirst, even as now a rush of water down from the great hills summons with clear splash far and wide the thirsty races of wild beasts. Then too as they ranged about they would occupy the well-known woodland haunts of the nymphs, out of which they knew that smooth-gliding streams of water with a copious gush bathed the dripping rocks, trickling down over the green moss; and in parts welled and bubbled out over the level plain. And as yet they knew not how to apply fire to their purposes or to make use of skins and clothe their body in the spoils of wild beasts, but they would dwell in woods and mountain-caves and forests and shelter in the brushwood their squalid limbs when driven to shun the buffeting of the winds and the rains. And they were unable to look to the general weal and knew not how to make a common use of any customs or laws."<sup>1</sup>

Propertius (50-15 B.C.), the great Roman elegiac poet, dwelt much on the simplicity and virtue of golden age life. He had imbibed a wealth of Greek mythology and his conception of the felicity of the youthful race was essentially Hesiodic. In his *Elegies* he gives a history of the rise of Rome beginning with

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1. T. Lucreti Cari, *De Rerum Natura*, translated by H.A.J. Munro. 4th ed. London and Cambridge, 1891. Book V, 1.922 ff.



the early time when everything was peaceful and happy and ending with the war and tumult of his own time. His soul fled from the harsh life about him and found solace in the simplicity of the men of old. He imagined the life of that age to be spent in a beautiful valley where spring was perpetual and flowers blossomed and fruits ripened continuously. Shame and false modesty were unknown to the people and the women were true in love.

"Happy in days of yore were the peace loving rustic youths, whose orchard and harvest were their wealth."<sup>1</sup> They dwelt in "a grove enclosed with an ivy-clad ravine, with many a tree rustling in concert with the splash of native waters, the shady abode of Sylvanus, whither the sweet pipe called the sheep out of the glace to drink."<sup>2</sup> There was in that place a spring, beneath the crest of Mount Arganthus, a liquid abode, loved by the Thynian Nymphs; over it from the boughs of the trees in that wilderness hung dewey apples indebted to no care, and around, in the water meadow, rose fair lilies, grouped with purple poppies."<sup>3</sup> "In those days women were true in love, and virtue throve everywhere."<sup>4</sup>

In contrast to this picture Propertius saw the armies of Rome lay waste the land and destroy the honor and virtue of the

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1. The Elegies of Propertius. Translated by the Rev P.J.F. Gautilion London, 1899. Book IV. Elegy XIII.

2. Ibid, Book V. Elegy IV.

3. Ibid, Book I. Elegy XX.

4. Ibid, Book II Elegy IX.



people. He looked into the past and beheld everything desirable for complete happiness, but he seemed to have no hope that these things would return.

Perhaps no Roman poet has made use of so much of the Grecian mythology as has Horace (65-8 B.C.). One cannot read the odes and epodes without being struck with his constant employment of it. What concerns us here is the eulogy of country life in the second epode. He counts that man happy who lives far from the city and has no care but the watching of his flocks, and this life he compares to that in the golden age. In contrast to this is the greed and avarice and the strivings for power and glory which gets hold of those in the city. His account of the Happy Isles beyond the Western Ocean, Epode XVI, is similar to Homer's Isles of the Blest.

In the first book of the Metamorphosis Ovid (43 B.C.-17 A.D.) characterizes the ages of gold, silver, brass, and iron. He follows Hesiod very closely but omits the heroic age. The only thing that need be noted here is that Ovid considers the golden age as long past and thinks his own age is the iron; but he speaks as if the degeneration were complete. Hesiod thought he was at the beginning of the iron age and pictured the misery that was yet to come. Ovid placed himself well along in this last age and spoke of all those things as having already come to pass. Hesiod says, at last fair modesty and justice will fly and leave only sorrow and hopelessness, and this has happened when Ovid writes, for he says that faith, piety, and justice are in exile and only fraud,





force and violence remain. This indicates that there was an increasing tendency on the part of the poets to consider their own time as the worst the world had ever seen, and to look farther and farther back into the past for an ideal age where their spirits might find comfort and solace.

We come now to one of the most interesting of the ancient poets in his use of the golden age material. Virgil (70-19 B.C.) is important for our purposes for several reasons. His conception of the life of the golden age is essentially like that of all the poets; he is like them in picturing the golden age as a contrast to the life he has experienced; but he is unlike them in one important element - instead of looking to the past he sees the golden age in the immediate future. This is a noteworthy exception to the general rule and has a striking parallel in the eighteenth century.

The prophecy of the new age of perfection is found in the Fourth Eclogue. It is the product of youthful enthusiasm and optimism. Virgil, as a young man, witnessed a great change in national affairs. It was the passing of a crisis which gave a new lease of life to the empire and a new hope to the people. The Perusian war had laid waste the land, institutions had been trampled under foot, business was destroyed, and the inhabitants reduced to starvation. The treaty of Brundisium brought peace, and an improvement was immediately apparent. Once more people began to throng the marts of trade, business was revived, and plenty



succeeded famine. It was natural that at such a time the fervor of the poet should hail the return of the golden age. Herein is the element of contrast which we have found as a distinguishing mark among all poets. But in this case it is something more than a "contrast between tranquility imagined and woe and warfare actually experienced." Virgil had seen the havoc of war in the razed cities and ruined fields, he knew the expression of woe on the faces of homeless men and women - it was all a matter of first hand experience and indelibly written on his consciousness. He had seen, too, the sharp antithesis after peace was restored. The busy cities, the furrowed fields, the happy homes, the cheerful faces - all these were coming to be of his experiences. How inevitable that under these circumstances the mind of the poet should go back to that golden age of the dim remembered past and transfer it to the present, saying, in substance: "This is the dawn of the second golden age."

The new age is to be brought about by the birth of a wondrous child. As he grows, venemous herbs shall perish, and the serpent shall die. The plowman shall abandon the field; corn shall mature uncultivated; fruit shall ripen spontaneously; the cattle and the lion shall lie down together; blood-guiltiness shall disappear; and war shall be no more.

"The last age, heralded in Cymaeon song, is come, and the great march of the centuries begins anew. Now the Virgin returns; now Saturn is king again, and a new and better race descends from on high. Only do thou, pure Lucina, deign to smile on the nascent



babe, by whose grace our iron breed shall at last cease, and the age of gold dawn on all the world. ....

"On thee, child, at every turn the unlabored earth shall shower her gifts. The ivy-tendrils shall wanton with the fox-glove, and the bean with the laughing briar. The goats, uncalled, shall bring home their udder big with milk, and the cattle shall not fear the great lion. Thy cradle, even, shall blossom with smiling flowers; the serpent shall perish and the herb that hides its poison be no more, and Assyrian spices shall spring in every field. . . . .

"But soon, when the strong years have made thee man, the seaman himself shall quit the wave, nor shall any ocean-going barque pass to and fro with merchandise; for every land shall be rich with the fruits of all. Earth shall not groan under the harrow, nor the vine under the pruning hook; the hardy ploughman shall loose his oxen from the yoke; wool shall be taught no more to counterfeit an alien hue, but the ram in his meadow shall himself change his fleece - now for the sweet blush of purple, anon for the saffron's yellow - and scarlet shall clothe the feeding lambs at will." <sup>1</sup>

Such were the conditions which Virgil prophesied. Instead of picturing an evolution from the gold to the iron age, he saw a rise from the iron age to the golden. He characterizes the two ages just as all the poets before him have done, the difference

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1. Virgil translated by John Jackson. Oxford, 1908. Fourth Eclogue, ll.4-45.



in their treatment is a difference in point of view. All thought themselves to be living in the iron age and all sought an age of perfect happiness. Most of the poets found this time in the past, Virgil saw the same conditions in the future.

But time proved the great poet a false prophet. The fabled child did not regenerate society; conditions did not become perfect; the ideal world of the poet's fancy did not materialize. Soon the glamor began to fade, the light of hope died out, and humanity, ever as quick to forget the old as to accept the new, settled once more into the even tenor of its way, content to think of the golden age as a glory of the past, impossible for the present or the future. Virgil, himself, growing wiser as he grew older, ceased to predict the immediate return of the age of Saturn. The only trace of the prophecy of the fourth Eclogue that we find in the Aeneid is a hope for the Reign of Peace.

We have traced the idea of the golden age from the time it first took form out of the pagan mythology down through the Greek and Roman poets to the Christian era. As a result of this survey three conclusions may be drawn. First, the characteristics of the golden age. It is always considered as a time of peace, plenty, happiness, and innocence. All the poets unite in giving it some of these attributes. Second, the motive for writing of the golden age. In each case it was noticeable that there was a decided contrast between the conditions in which the poet lived





and those which he pictured in the golden age. He was depressed by the gross reality of actual life and found relief in the ideality of a fancied life. It was a longing to escape from oppression into freedom which caused the poets to mark the contrast between their age and a mythical age of happiness, and to designate these times as the iron and golden ages. Third, the time of existence of the golden age. Hesiod considered it to have been far in the past. As years passed each succeeding poet thought his own time farther and farther removed from it. They all looked back upon it with a sigh and wished they had lived then. Up to Virgil's time no one had held forth any hope of the future realization of the golden age. But this is what he did, and therein came a new element which was later developed. It should be remembered, however, that this was a prophecy of the immediate return of the golden age, and that it was not soon followed by other similar predictions.



## Chapter Two.

### EIGHTEENTH CENTURY IMITATORS.

It may be truly said that there never was a time in the history of literature when nature was wholly ignored. Yet it cannot be asserted that the importance given it through successive periods of literary history is by any means a constant factor. The part played by external nature in the literature of different ages may be compared to the ebb and flow of the tides. At one time poets are enthusiastic admirers of nature and their verse is filled with the beauties of rural scenery. At another, the attention of the leading literary men is centered in politics or religion, and satire and morality crowd nature out of their verse. Milton's verse is an example of the high tide of nature poetry. The literature of Pope's age may be considered the ebb tide, while it rose to flood tide again in the age of Wordsworth. Yet Pope's poetry is not without nature allusions, such as they are. The life of the golden age, as it was depicted by the Classical poets, was essentially the life of the country. Wherever there are imitations of this life there must be some acquaintance with rural conditions. An understanding of the typical Augustan attitude toward nature will make more clear the new point of view later in the century, and prove a valuable aid in appreciating the obstacles against which the rising romantic school had to contend.

It often happens that some man, who, by genius, force of circumstances, or what not, becomes the leader in a certain



movement, or the spokesman for its adherents, is given credit for establishing the principles of that movement when, as a matter of fact, he may have had nothing to do with it in the beginning. This is very much the case with Pope (1688-1744). But he must not be thought of as forming the Augustan taste into a love for the city and a dislike for the country. The tendency in that direction existed before Pope. He only gave it expression in polished literary form. Indeed, as a youth he had a real appreciation of nature, which leads one to believe that in another age under different conditions, he would have been a different man in literature. In a letter to Cromwell, dated July 17, 1709, he says: "Having a vacant space here, I will fill it with a short Ode on Solitude (which I found yesterday by great accident and which I find by the date was written when I was not yet twelve years old), that you may perceive how long I have continued in my passion for a rural life, and in the same employments of it."<sup>1</sup> The love of solitude expressed in this Ode is worthy one of the romanticists half a century later.

Another interesting production of this period of Pope's life is his Pastorals, with a Discourse on Pastoral, written in 1704, but not published until 1709. The Discourse has a direct bearing on our subject, and a part of it will be quoted.

"The original<sup>of</sup> poetry is ascribed to that age which succeeded the creation of the world: and as the keeping of flocks seems to

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1. The works of Alexander Pope. New edition. With introductions and notes by Rev. Whitwell Elwin. In 10 volumes. London, 1871. Vol. IV, p.407, n.1.



have been the first employment of mankind, the most ancient sort of poetry was probably pastoral. It is natural to imagine that the leisure of those ancient shepherds admitting and inviting some diversion, none was so proper to that solitary and sedentary life as singing; and that in their songs they took occasion to celebrate their own felicity. From hence a poem was invented, and afterwards improved to a perfect image of that happy time; which, by giving us an esteem for the virtues of a former age, might recommend them to the present. If we would copy nature, it may be useful to take this idea along with us, that pastoral is an image of what they call the golden age. So that we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceived then to have been; when the best of men followed the employment."<sup>1</sup>

Pope here gives his conception of the golden age. It is essentially that of the Classical poets: a life of simplicity, leisure, and felicity. Such a time existed just after the creation of the world, it is not possible now, but that sense of contrast gives an "esteem for the virtues of the former age." Hence it is the duty of the eighteenth century poet to picture that "former age" and not contemporary conditions. For there exists a vast difference between the shepherds then and now. In those days everybody lived in the country and the best men were shepherds. But in the Age of Anne the best men were city "wits", and only the rude and the uncultured had anything to do with flocks. This

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1. Ibid. vol. I, p. 258.





was the attitude of his age in regard to the country and rural pursuits, and Pope was only drifting with the tide when he made his Pastorals tell the story of Greek rather than English shepherds.

One of the watchwords of the romantic movement was "back to nature". It began with the first of the new order and continued down through the century with ever increasing strength. The phrase is singularly ambiguous and meant various things with different men. Perhaps as often as anything else, it was a call to return to the conditions of life in the golden age. Pope anticipated this phase of the romantic movement when he used nature and the golden age as practically synonymous. However, he did not follow it up by advocating that Englishmen return to the golden age. He was content to let that remain a fancy of the past.

In his introduction to the Pastorals, Elwin says, "the golden age was itself an exploded fable, which had lost its hold on the imagination",<sup>1</sup> - a dream by which Englishmen in the eighteenth century could not have been beguiled. When the prophecy of the Fourth Eclogue failed of fulfillment the dream of the golden age may have been driven from the minds of some people, but it never lost its hold on the imagination. Instead, the imagination was suppressed and not allowed free reign. If the eighteenth century gentleman had no interest in a fancied age of bliss, it was because he studied to curb his imagination and

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1. Ibid. Vol. I, p.247.



check the flights of fancy. But when the reactionaries came to the front and gave unbridled sway to the emotions, people again became interested in the patriarchal age. The "exploded fable" was not rehabilitated; imagination simply came into its own and brought its inevitable concomitant, the dream of the golden age.

Two other efforts of Pope's early life are to be noted in this connection. The first part of Windsor Forest (to line 291) was written in 1704. The latter part was not added until 1713, in which year it was published. There is a decided difference in the two parts of the poem. The first, written about the time of the Pastorals, abounds in nature touches and hints of the golden age. These elements were not in keeping with the standard verse of the day, and they were so numerous that Addison thought to counteract their possible effect on contemporaries and at the same time defend the established order, by warning the poets, in a good-natured way, against introducing "trifling antiquated fables unpardonable in a poet that was past sixteen".<sup>1</sup> Pope seems to have taken this advice to himself, for in the last of the poem, written nine years later, these objectionable features are conspicuously absent.

The Messiah first appeared in the Spectator for May 14, 1712, No. 378. It is an adaptation of the prophecies of Isaiah and Virgil's Fourth Eclogue. Pope classed it among the Pastorals because it is a prophetic vision of a golden age. Yet it is hardly comparable to either of the originals (because it is so

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1. Ibid. Quoted Vol. I, p. 331.



filled with the affected and stilted diction of the day. It was, however, contrary to the prevailing spirit of the age in subject at least. Pope was becoming so thoroughly imbued with that spirit that he published the *Messiah* as from the pen of another man, "a great genius, a friend of mine, in the country."<sup>1</sup>

From this time on Pope was the typical exponent of the conventionality and decorum of his age. Thirty years after the time of the *Pastorals*, he refers to the state of nature, in the *Essay on Man*.<sup>2</sup> The conditions of man in the golden age, with reference to habits of life, are stated, but coldly stated. There is no picture of the felicities of that age, no description of the beauties of nature; the bare facts are catalogued, and that is all. He does not advocate a return to the state of nature; he sees no hope of its realization by future generations. How differently this theme was treated half a century later!

It is interesting to notice the influence of the predominant spirit of the age upon Pope. The keynote of that spirit was conformity to custom. This extended into all fields, dress, religion, politics, literature. In everything it was more a matter of form than of feeling. In fact, emotion and imagination were tabooed. When Pope indulged his fancy in dreams of the golden age, in the *Pastorals*, he was not conforming. But his extreme youth excused him. Commenting on this period of Pope's life, Johnson

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1. *Ibid.* Vol. I, p.307.

2. *Epistle III*, Section IV, lines 147 ff.



says: "It seems natural for a young poet to imitate himself by pastorals, which, not professing to imitate real life, require no experience, and exhibiting only the simple operation of unmixed passions, admit no subtle reasoning or deep inquiry."<sup>1</sup> Pastoral is an image of the golden age. It represents an ideal existence. To treat such a subject requires the indulgence of the imagination. This alone was sufficient to cause it to be condemned by the eighteenth century classicists. Pope undoubtedly had genius in this direction, but it was thwarted or turned into other channels by the powerful and all-pervading spirit of Classicism. A love for the golden age could be condoned only in youth, when "subtle reasoning and deep inquiry" were not to be expected. One can sometimes almost believe that the precise gentlemen of the eighteenth century had never been children. With sober voice and solemn mien they urge youth to put away childish things and take on the sedate air of age. The unconventionality of childhood must give way to the dignity of manhood. The romanticist, on the other hand, revels in the naiveté of childhood. No matter what external forces are brought to bear, there will always be men who remain children at heart even though old in years. This Pope could not do. It was all but impossible in his age. When he fell in with the literary vanguard of the early century, imagination and flights of fancy were placed under ban and he got farther and farther away from the simplicity of youth. The ideals of the age

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1. The Works of Samuel Johnson. Ed. Rev. Robert Lynam. Six volumes. London, 1825. Vol. IV, p. 252.





found such complete and polished expression in his verse that today eighteenth century classicism and Pope are almost synonymous.

Pope was not the only imitator of the Classical poets. Nearly all the pseudo-classicists of the eighteenth century made some attempt at copying the ancients. While Swift (1667-1745) is best known by his prose, his verse is extremely characteristic of the age. His imitations are such in name rather than content and he wholly misses the spirit of the original. In October, 1710, there appeared in the Tatler, A Description of a City Shower. An imitation of Virgil's Georgics. It is almost a travesty on the Roman master to think of him as describing a city shower. He loved the country and his interest was in rural scenes. But Swift probably loved the city quite as much. His interest was in things urban and he was writing for a city audience.

Another instance of the name without the thing, is his Town Eclogue, 1710. The very definition of eclogue - "an imitation of the pastoral life of a shepherd"<sup>1</sup> - excludes it from any such combination. Yet it shows the sentiment of the age and indicates that there was a tendency to transfer the nomenclature of the country to the city. There was an attempt to build the town into esteem as a poetical subject, and to this end the familiar rural titles were used. Not only was this done in a positive manner - by recommending the city, but in a negative way - by

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1. Webster's New International Dictionary, 1910. "Eclogue".



discrediting the country. In 1725 Swift wrote the Blessings of a Country Life. He recounts the felicities of rural life, and sums up its benefits in a satirical couplet which is a practical, matter-of-fact statement of the case from the point of view of a proud city resident:

"Far from our debtors; no Dublin letters;  
Not seen by our betters."<sup>1</sup>

He spent a part of a summer in the country and wrote a poem, The Country Life, celebrating the event. He speaks of the weeds and rocks, tells how some of the company made themselves sick by being gluttonous, and relates such incidents of an early walk as toes bruised on the stones and shins cracked in climbing the hedges. For him there are no singing birds, or beautiful flowers, or laughing brooks to whisper of the life of happiness and contentment. City life is the golden age for him.

Gay (1685-1732) was the friend and admirer of Pope. He perhaps had a greater appreciation of, and love for, the country than his distinguished friend, but he was too much under the influence of the time to become a poet of nature. In 1713 he dedicated to Pope his Rural Sports: A Georgic. It is a poem in two cantos reciting the pastimes of the country swains. The conclusion will give Gay's attitude toward his age:

"Ye happy fields, unknown to noise and strife,  
The kind rewarders of industrious life;

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1. Swift's Poetical Works. Ed. Rev. John Mitford. London, 1902. Vol. III, p.304.



Ye shady woods, where once I us'd to rove,  
 Alike indulgent to the muse and love;  
 Ye mummuring streams that in meanders roll,  
 The sweet composers of the pensive soul;  
 Farewell! - The city calls me from your bowers;  
 Farewell, amusing thoughts and peaceful hours."<sup>1</sup>

It will be seen that Gay looked upon the life of the country from a new standpoint. He really appreciated it as a retreat from the noise and strife of industrial life. But the spirit of the age spoke to him in the call of the city, and he answered the call. He took a long farewell - and, we fancy, a reluctant one - of the rural scenes he loved, and plunged into the city. The effect of the new atmosphere was immediately apparent. In 1714 he published The Shepherd's Week, in six Pastorals. It is an avowed attempt to discredit the belief that "pastoral is an image of the golden age". He asys, " my love to my native country (Britain) much pricketh me forward, to describe aright the manners of our own honest and laborious ploughmen, in no wise, sure, more unworthy a British poet's imitation, than those of Sicily or Arcadia; albeit, nor ignorant I am, what a rout and rabblement of critical gallimaw-fry hath been made of late days by certain young men of insipid delicacy, concerning, I wist not what, golden age, and othner outrageous conceits, to which they would confine pastoral. Wherof, I avow, I account nought at all . . . ." <sup>2</sup>.

1. Poetical Works of John Gay, in British Poets, vol.VIII.  
 Rural Sports, p. 262. Canto II. ll.163-170.

2. Ibid."Proeme to the Courteous Reader," prefixed to Shepherd's Week. p. 272.



The poem gives the events of six days in the lives of the Shepherds. The scene is laid in England, the characters are Englishmen, and they speak the common language of rural England. The details are so given that the vulgarity and ignorance of rural life are shown in all their grossness and repulsiveness. Its purpose was to blast the dream of an ideal golden age in connection with the lives of shepherds.

Gay continued his iconoclasm in the Prologue, designed for the pastoral tragedy of Dione. He describes the felicities of the golden age:

" Then nature rul'd; and love, devoid of art,  
Spoke the consenting language of the heart."<sup>1</sup>

Then beasts roamed free, there were no tyrant laws, nature taught the swain. But he casts a jeer at this state of things: " Such harmless swains!" He does not sigh for the golden age, he is content with his own time. Such an attack on this fancy of the imagination pleased the wits of the coffee house because it aided their cause.

Incidentally, it may be mentioned, that in the Prologue Gay expresses one of the fundamental reasons for an interest in the golden age.

" 'Tis the restraint that whets our appetite."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid. Prologue, designed for the pastoral tragedy of Dione.  
p. 323.

2. Ibid.





The Classical poets escaped from the restraint of their own real existence into the imaginary life of the golden age. Because they were confined and bound down to a harsh and cruel world they sought release in a world of the imagination. By discountenancing the golden age and ridiculing imagination, Gay was binding the people down to reality. He was helping to forge the chain of reason and decorum which held his age to a contemplation of the actual and real, and kept it within the city where natural beauties were unknown. He was whetting the appetite for those things that were denied. In time the shackles began to gall. One day imagination flew the bonds, reason began to lose its hold, and the chain was broken.



## Chapter Three.

### EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ROMANTICISTS.

It remained for a poet of the north of Scotland, born and reared among those romantic scenes which were later to be made immortal in the Ministrelsy of the Border, to deal the first effective blow to the cold formalism of Pope, Swift, Gay, and their school. James Thomson<sup>1</sup> (1700-1748) was born in the pastoral village of Ednam, Roxburghshire. Shortly after the poet's birth, his father moved to Southdean. There Thomson grew up in the center of Scotland's richest and most varied scenery. He was much out of doors and the sublime glories of nature were silently but inerradicably daguerrestyped upon his mind.

As a young man Thomson had an ambition to enter the church. During his University life he wrote poetry in secret, and carried on his theological studies. He was too much under the influence of the Muse to be admitted into the church in those days. His sermons were criticised because they were too imaginative. Disappointed because of this failure, he went the way of all the young men of his time with literary ability or ambition - to London. In 1725 he arrived there poor and destitute. By the assistance of friends he obtained a place as tutor to the son of Lord Bining, but with a competence barely sufficient for his support. Here he began writing Winter (July 1725). Although con-

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1. Biographical data taken from Dictionary of National Biography, New York, 1908, and Introduction to the Poetical Works of James Thomson. Ed. Rev. George Gilfillan. Edinburgh, 1853.



fined to the city, the approach of autumn caused his mind to go back to the woods and fields. The thoughts of the harvest season touched the secret springs of his soul, and the pent-up imagery of his romantic childhood overflowed in the sonorous strains of the first of the Seasons. In it his soul escaped from the depression and disappointment of city life and revelled in the happy freedom of his native heath. This is a new element in the literature of escape. Instead of fleeing to some fancied golden age of the long ago, the poet finds the same relief and comfort in a contemplation of external nature. It is the beginning of the movement which is called the "return to nature", but it goes back for its inspiration to the poetical conception of the mythological golden age.

This was something new in the poetry of the century, and as Winter went the rounds of the booksellers in manuscript, they might have been heard to remark - "very elegant poem, but not in our line; too much description in it; a little wit would improve it; could not Mr. Thomson write something in the style of Pope or Gay? - that would be sure to take".<sup>1</sup> And just here began the struggle between the "style of Pope or Gay" and that other style with "too much description in it", which was destined to divide the literary world into two hostile camps. It was the beginning of the revolt of romanticism against the pseudo-classicism of the eighteenth century - a revolt that has gone to such an extreme that there is a tendency, in some of our leading Universities, towards a counter-reaction against the ultra-romanticism of modern writers.

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1. Thomson's Poetical Works, Introduction XI.



The booksellers thought they knew the "trade" and could tell what was wanted, but the success of this poem proved that they had not sounded the current of public taste to its greatest depth. When the sellers were finally prevailed upon, by the importunities of Thomson's friends, to publish Winter, it became immediately popular. It was recommended by some of the leading men of the day, and ran through three editions the first year. Then followed in quick succession, Summer, 1727; Spring, 1728; Autumn, and a complete edition of the Seasons, 1730, "rounded off with that glorious Hymn which seems the essence of their beauty collected into a cloud of fragrance, and, led by the breath of devotion, directed up to heaven".<sup>1</sup> With this the first link in the chain that held the imagination was broken. Other poets followed in the new spirit. Taking the sentiment of a true appreciation of nature, a new attitude toward the golden age, and a humanitarian feeling, from Thomson, they built a new literature which effectively combatted that of the school of Pope.

Most of the characteristics of the romantic movement are found in embryo in Thomson. The Seasons, perhaps, embodies more of them than any other single poem of the century. In Spring he has a digression on the mythological golden age. He pictures its innocence, its happiness, its health, and its freedom from death, rapine, and bloodshed. But, like the Classical poets, he thinks he is living in the iron age.

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1. Ibid. XIII.





"But now those white, unblemished manners, whence  
 The fabling poets took their golden age,  
 Are found no more amid these iron times,  
 These dregs of life!"<sup>1</sup>

Instead, reason is half extinct; Anger and Revenge rove at large; Envy blights joy; and Fear weakens manhood; man has lost all sentiments of mercy and kindness towards his fellows and towards dumb beasts. It was not so in the golden age, for then man was humane as well as human; it ought not to be so now, for man should be

"The lord, and not the tyrant, of the world".<sup>2</sup>

This is the beginning of the spirit of humanitarianism which became prominent with the romanticists - the spirit which caused Cowper to refuse to number among his friends anyone who needlessly crushed a worm; the spirit which throbs in the tender lines To a Mouse, on turning up her nest with the plow.<sup>3</sup> The poets drew their inspiration from the golden age when there was no crime or violence, and cried out against the thoughtless inhumanity of their own time.

If Thomson is not a refined poet of spirituality, he is a poet of the sublimity of nature. Among his best nature descriptions is that of the Torrid Zone, in Summer. He describes

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1. Ibid. Spring, l.273ff.  
 2. Ibid. l.242.  
 3. Burns.



the luxuriant vegetation and excellent fruits in a way that reminds one immediately of the golden age in the Elegies of Propertius. It would seem that he had such a model in mind for he concludes thus:

"Witness, thou best Anâna, thou the pride  
Of vegetable life, beyond whate'er  
The poets imaged in the golden age."<sup>1</sup>

Another instance of probable Classical influence may be drawn from the same poem. He describes the "wondrous waste of wealth"<sup>2</sup> in fruits and flowers, the "gay profusion of luxurious bliss"<sup>3</sup> while living in the lavish display and "pomp of Nature"<sup>4</sup> where "Afric's golden rivers roll"<sup>5</sup>, and it rivals the Greek Reign of Cronus and the Latin Age of Saturn. Just how much the golden age imagery of the Classical poets influenced him in these flights of fancy, we may not say. At any rate, it is obvious that the influence is there. It is not merely objective, for he catches the spirit of the ancients. While Pope and his school only strip the surface-feelings of form and words from the Classical poets who dealt with the golden age, Thomson reads between the lines and behind them, and transmits the feelings and underlying sentiments which form the basis of the universal appeal of the golden age.

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1. Thomson's Poetical Works, Summer, 1.690 ff

2. Ibid. 1.869.

3. Ibid. 1.870

4. Ibid. 1.871.

5. Ibid. 1. 882.



Despite the fact that Thomson laments that he is living in the iron age when Truth, Virtue, and Honor are unknown, he thinks there is a place, even in his own time, where conditions approximate those of the golden age. The ancient classical poets (always excepting Virgil) thought they were living in the iron age. They looked upon the golden age as a time long past and had no hope of ever realizing its conditions in their earthly lives. The eighteenth century classicists followed the ancients in this respect. They too, saw the golden age in the past and only the iron age in the present. But Thomson goes a step in advance. Existing side by side with the iron age, or the common life of the city, are the conditions of the golden age, or life in the country. This golden age may be more in the minds of men than in a lavish display of nature, but it exists none the less truly. Here it is largely subjective, whereas the mythological golden age was considered objectively. From this time forward poets find the golden age wherever conditions are conducive to happiness, quiet, undisturbed meditation, and freedom of imagination. Such conditions do not exist in the city, hence they seek the country, which is often endowed with the natural bounties, and always with the psychological elements, of the mythical golden age. Thomson is the first to assume this new attitude. His idea may be given briefly. He is the happiest of men who lives far from public strife and enjoys the pleasures of rural life in the retirement of a pastoral valley. There, with him, dwell Truth, Innocence, Beauty, and Youth. There he may sit in undisturbed meditation and



let his imagination carry him whithersoever it will.

"This is the life which those who fret in guilt,  
And guilty cities, never knew; the life  
Led by primeval ages, uncorrupt,  
When angels dwelt, and God himself, with man".<sup>1</sup>

Thomson spoke from experience. He had enjoyed the happy life of a country swain while he roamed the hills of romantic Scotland. When he wrote the Seasons, he was confined in the city "like a caged linnet",<sup>2</sup> as he tells us. There the noise and strife emphasized, by contrast, the happiness of his rural life. To return to it would be truly to enter the golden age. This appealed to the people of his age who were beginning to fret in the bonds of Reason and Decorum, because it offered an avenue of escape from bondage to freedom, in mind as well as in body. The relief which he pointed out was in an escape to nature. It meant the leaving of the city, where it was improper to dream dreams and see visions, and the entering of the country where the wildness and abandon of nature were conducive to a free sway of the imagination. In short, it was to enjoy the felicities of the golden age. The call to "return to nature" was answered with ever increasing avidity, until the "country" became as much a cult as the "city" had been at the beginning of the century.

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1. Ibid. Autumn, l. 1349 ff.

2. Ibid.





The Castle of Indolence is a beautiful poetical illusion. The first Canto, especially, is a bewitching piece of seductive imagery. "no hymn to Sleep ever was so soft - 'no dream within a dream,' of rest beyond the dreaming land, was ever so subtle".<sup>1</sup> The first Canto may be considered the product of the poet's unhampered genius, when imagination had the right of way. It is an account of a mystical life of indolence in an illusory castle somewhere in the dreamland of poetic fancy. The inmates are prisoners but have no desire to escape. They live in indolence with all pleasures at their disposal.

"Their only labor was to kill the time".<sup>2</sup>

In the courts were gardens of sweet smelling flowers, and on the walls hung beautiful pictures. The one which attracted the most attention depicted the Patriarchal Age - the golden age of the Hebrews.

The object of this part of the poem seems to be the praise of indolence. One characteristic of the golden age is that there is no need of work. This is why some people are attracted to it. It is not hard to imagine that this is one element which appealed to Thomson, when we think of him strolling about his garden, hands clasped behind him, eating off the sunny side of the peaches as they hung on the trees. But the time was not yet ripe for such a poem to go unchallenged. Probably at the instigation of friends, or because of the promptings of his own

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1. Ibid. Introduction, XVII.

2. Ibid. Castle of Indolence, Canto I, Section LXII.



conscience, the poet added the second Canto. It relates the birth and education of a Knight of Arts and Industry who attacks and overthrows the Castle of Indolence and frees the prisoners, who are instructed to labor for their livelihood.

The history of the Castle of Indolence is paralleled by the history of the golden age idea up to the second quarter of the eighteenth century. Thomson, the poetical genius, created a great castle where people lived in happy indolence; then Thomson, the practical man of the world, created the Knight of Arts and Industry who destroyed the castle. So the classical poets created the fancy of the golden age and took great delight in fleeing to it as a rest from the realities of the world. The Castle of their imagination was a pastoral land of simplicity, happiness, and idleness. As civilization advanced and the people turned from the care of flocks to commerce and business pursuits, these things became of greater importance than poetical images. When the materialistic spirit triumphed the dream of the golden age was largely ignored - the Castle was destroyed, because people were too much engrossed with the practical affairs of life to indulge in impracticable fancies of the imagination. This was the status of the golden age at the beginning of the eighteenth century. By giving free reign to the imagination and ignoring purely material and practical considerations Thomson helped to bring the golden age again into favor. Through the medium of his poetry he rebuilt the dream castle of the ancient classical poets, and from his



time on, a steadily increasing number of people find in it a refuge from the din and tumult raised by the illustrious Knight of Arts and Industry.

Thomson broke away from the established order. He brought imagination and nature into eighteenth century poetry. They were old elements, but new in the literature of his time. Consequently he was, at first, a lone voice crying in the wilderness. But it was not long until other poets began to echo his cry. For a time they did not stand, as he had stood, in direct opposition to the prevailing current. The first instance of the use of the romantic material introduced by Thomson, is in didactic poems. The poets, in general, were too much under the influence of the old school to break entirely away, and yet they recognized the new tendencies and sought to embody them in their work. The phase of the romantic movement which has to do with the golden age and which is most conspicuous in these early poems, is the return to nature, by which is meant a return to the country. The contrast between the country and the city was apparent to all, but the great advantages of a life in the country were not so clearly seen by the eighteenth century "gentleman" as by the young romanticist. It is not surprising then, that the early poets of the new movement should begin by endeavoring to keep in the good graces of both. What vehicle was better adapted to this purpose than the didactic poem? It is not to be understood, however, that Somerville, Akenside, and the other didactic poets, were consciously aiding the romantic movement by subtly introducing the return



to nature in a poem that was obviously classical (the term is used in its commonly accepted eighteenth century meaning - more properly pseudo-classical) in spirit as well as form. Far from it. The new elements crept into the poems unconsciously, due perhaps to the author's habit of mind or to his vocation in life. At any rate, the fact that they are there is abundant proof that the new spirit was in the air and that it was gaining a hold upon the rising poets of the age. An examination of a few of these poems will serve to make clear the treatment of the golden age idea among the semi-classic writers.

Somerville's (1692-1742) Chase (1735), a didactic treatise on the hunt, has a touch of the "return to nature" sentiment.

"O happy! if ye knew your happy state,  
Ye rangers of the field; whom nature boon  
Cheers with her smiles, and every element  
Conspires to bless".<sup>1</sup>

The poet nowhere openly advocates a return to nature, but he praises the country people and the lives they live. He draws the contrast between the free, open rural life, and the crowded condition of the city. It may be that the rural swain has no beautiful works of art on which to gaze, but he can feast his soul on the beauties of nature. It is plainly seen which way the poet's true interest lies, yet the call to return to nature is only implied.

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1. Poetical Works of William Somerville, in British Poets, Vol. VIII. Bk. IV, p. 473.





Mark Akenside(1721-1770), a doctor and a poet, wrote the poem which was the original of the long line of verse under the caption of various "Pleasures". His Pleasures of Imagination(1744) has great beauty in its descriptions. The title is extremely suggestive of the new movement in literature. Imagination had been suppressed as childish and unworthy a gentlemen. It was never to be indulged, reason should rule all actions and words. That a practical man of the world should, in 1738, write a poem extolling the pleasure to be found in imagination, is an interesting commentary on the progress of the new movement. While the poem is more philosophical than imaginative, its romantic characteristics are the allusions to the classical golden age, the enthusiastic touches of nature, and, most important of all, the title.

Another physician-poet is John Armstrong(1709-1779). His poem has the very practical title The Art of Preserving Health (1744). In the first book, entitled Air, he advocates the country life. He calls upon the people of the city to get out into the pure air of the country where Elysian breezes blow. He speaks from the point of view of a physician, not a romantic poet, but he recognizes the joy and happiness of rural life as well as the health-giving qualities of the country. In Exercise he commends out door life and praises the country people, especially the peasants, because they live close to nature. Pope and his followers could see no joy outside the city. They sneered at the country swains and emphasized the ignorance and vulgarity so



prevalent in rural communities. For them true happiness could not exist apart from learning and culture. Nor did they consider the country as more healthful than the city. The storms and exposure of the one were considered much more harmful than the shelter and protection of the other. Yet Armstrong would have everybody live in the country - return to nature. Probably his motive was largely utilitarian, but there was certainly much of the humanitarian element in it. The beauties of nature appealed to him as they could not have appealed to one of the old school. His appreciation of rural life was genuine, and he had more than a mere "professional" interest in dwelling upon nature as he did.

We turn now from the didactic poets who unconsciously incorporated in their works some of the elements of romanticism, to one of the few poets of the century who consciously aided the romantic movement and sought to discount pseudo-classicism, in order to take up a new phase of the golden age when it first appears, and trace it through the century. Thus far, it has been seen, the return to nature has been advocated in a general way. The poets have drawn general contrasts between the city and the country and pictured the happiness of rural life as the ancients painted the life of the golden age. However there was not a personal longing for a quiet life in the country. This new note is first found in the poems of Thomas Warton (1728-1790). Warton loved nature with a simple, unaffected, whole-hearted love, and



it seemed easy for him to escape, in imaginative fancy, from the city to the natural beauties of the country. Consequently his poems abound in hints of the golden age and suggestions of the return to nature. In the Pleasures of Melancholy (1745), (one of the many titles modelled after Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination), he contrasts the artificiality of court life with the happiness of romantic solitude and, like his didactic predecessors, advocates the life in the country for all who would be truly happy, but unlike them, wishes such an existence for himself. When old age comes upon him he would fly from the world and live in quiet seclusion. The retreat which he describes has all the characteristics of the golden age of the ancient poets. There would be a lowly cottage situated in a beautiful valley enclosed by dark-branching trees; a murmuring river would flow through the valley, and on its banks would grow all kinds of fruit-bearing trees. One need only turn to any one of the ancient poets for the original of this romantic retreat. But there is a difference in the point of view. The ancient looked upon the golden age as past, Warton transferred the conditions of that past age to his own time; the one found the contrast to his own life in a time long past and impossible of attainment save in fancy, the other found relief for the cares of life in an actual place which he endowed with fancied attributes. With all the imaginary characteristics of anythological golden age that may be added to it, there is, as the basis of Warton's picture, a bit of British landscape



which gives it reality. He would find the golden age in a return to nature, that is, nature as it came from the hand of the Creator, unblemished by the work of man. There he would spend the last days of his life apart from the world, enjoying all the blessings of the fabled golden age. He expresses the yearning for such a retreat thus:

"But when life's busier scene is o'er,  
 And age shall give the tresses hoar,  
 I'd fly soft Luxury's marble dome,  
 And make an humble thatch my home".<sup>1</sup>

The longing for a golden age in which to spend the last days of life, is next found in the Visions in Verse, for the entertainment and instruction of younger minds (1751), by Nathaniel Cotton (d. 1788). The fact that this new phase of the romantic movement was incorporated in a didactic poem so soon after it appeared is further evidence of the way in which romanticism was permeating the different literary strata and subtly making its presence known.

The Visions exhibit a true appreciation of natural beauty and advocate the country life for health and happiness. In Vision III, on Health, Cotton pictures the retreat where he would spend his old age. He sees a rural landscape dressed in the garb of summer; flocks feed on the verdant hills; in the valley

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1. Poetical Works of Goldsmith, Collins, and T. Wartin. Ed. by Rev. George Gilfillan. Edinburgh, 1854. p. 226.





flows a crystal clear brook; near it stands

"An humble cottage thatch'd with straw"<sup>1</sup>;

it is supplied with all the necessities of life, but none of the luxuries; nature, and not art, is supreme. This rural scene is the "calm seat" into which the poet would go in old age and live apart from the turmoil of the world. Like Warton he would escape from the scenes of his life's labor to a golden age of quiet meditation, and he clothes an English hill, stream and valley, with all the bounty, happiness, and quiet of the classical golden age. There is the sense of contrast between the woe and strife of actual life and the joy and peace of an ideal existence which was so prominent among the ancient poets, but there is also a strictly modern point of view in finding that ideal abode in actual contemporary conditions - by returning to nature. Cotton's expression of the longing for a personal golden age is very similar to Warton's:

"Hail thou sweet, calm, unenvy'd seat!

I said, and bless'd the fair retreat:

Here would I pass my remnant days,

Unknown to censure and to praise;

Forget the world, and be forgot".<sup>2</sup>

Four years after the publication of the Visions, James Grainger (1721-1766) wrote an ode on Solitude (1755) which embodies the phase of the golden age which we are now tracing.

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1. Poetical Works of Nathaniel Cotton, in British Poets, vol. II  
Vision III.

2. Ibid.



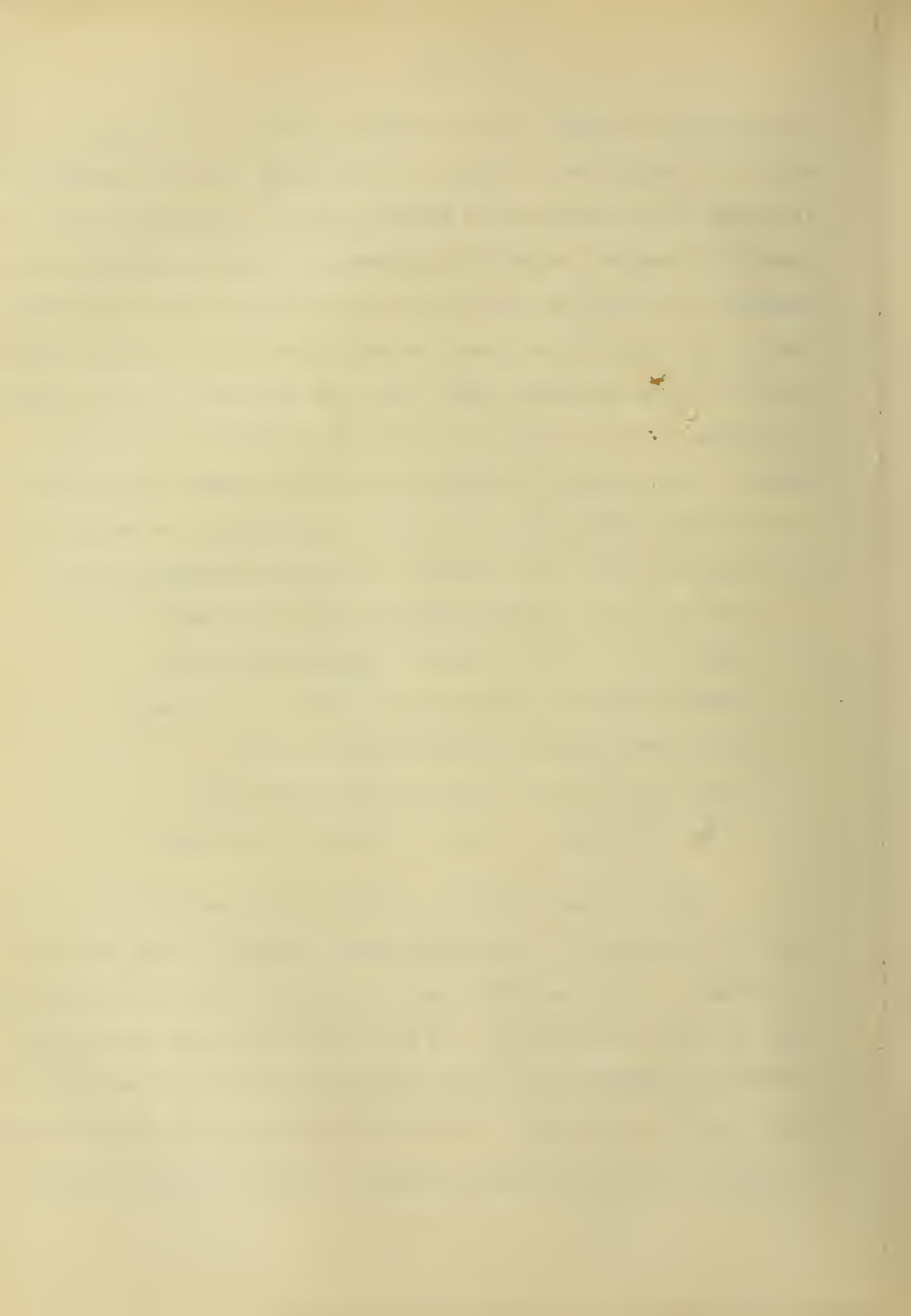
The poet is an ardent lover of nature and the life away from the world, and represents himself as an old man living in quiet and solitude in the depths of a rural retreat. A young man enters his romantic lodge and asks to be allowed to remain there and seek a solace for a troubled mind. But the old poet reminds the youth that he is a part of a great society to which he owes his life's service; he is dependent upon other men and must live and work with them; he must fight the practical battles of the world while he is young and virile, then when age saps his strength and he is no longer able to endure the struggle, he may seek a hermitage and live unto himself. Grainger expresses it thus:

"But when old age has silver'd o'er thy head,  
 When memory fails, and all thy vigor's fled,  
 Then may'st thou seek the stillness of retreat,  
 Then hear aloof the human tempest beat,  
 Then will I greet thee to my woodland cave,  
 Allay the pangs of age, and smooth thy grave".<sup>1</sup>

The solitary retreat in which Grainger spent his old age, and to which he invited his young friend to come when he too should be old, has the characteristics which are common with those of Warton and Cotton. He found rest from the beating of the "human tempest" in a still, woodland cave which was like the golden age in its quiet, its freedom from care, pain, and labor,

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1. Poetical Works of James Grainger, in British Poets, vol.X.  
 Ode on Solitude.



and its happiness. All the poets longed for such a retreat in old age, but this phase is nowhere so strongly emphasized as in Grainger. He would have each person live and strive in society instead of trying to avoid the struggles of life. But when the time of work is past, the old man may seek the contrast to his active life in a quiet, secluded existence, and enjoy the golden age in his second childhood.

Oliver Goldsmith(1728-1774), in The Deserted Village(1770) voices the desire for a personal golden age in which to spend the last days of life. His use of this phase of romanticism is rendered all the more interesting because of his manner of living. It is not the purpose here to give biographical material, save as it serves to throw light upon the poet's attitude toward the golden age, yet it is impossible to appreciate fully Goldsmith's longing to return to his early home without some acquaintance with his life. From earliest childhood he had been a natural rover. When the old Scotch school master,

"Shoulder'd his crutch, and show'd how fields were won",<sup>1</sup>

his young pupil felt the blood of primeval races surge through his veins. Before long he heeded the call of the wild and it lead him over the island of the Great Britain, and as a vagabond, on that famous tour through the romantic scenes of northern Europe.

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1. Poetical Works of Goldsmith, Collins, and T.Warton. Ed. by Rev. George Gilfillan. Edinburgh, 1854. Deserted Village, 1.158



When he returned to England and began to write, he was still wild. It cannot be said the he ever "settled down". Extravagant, carefree, wild, lavish, reckless, - he was all of these and yet he had a soul. In the midst of dissipation and extravagance there came into his mind a vagrant thought of the quiet home of his youth. He went back to the little village of Lishoy and lived over, in imagination, his boyhood days. With a childish simplicity he gives a picture of the village and its inhabitants - "only so far colored as memory colors all the past with its own poetic hues".<sup>1</sup> He goes over the familiar ground, which now "trade's unfeeling train" has changed and devastated. It recalls to his mind all the happy experiences of his home life in contrast to the cruel struggles of the world, and we detect tears in the eyes of the prodigal as he says:

"In all my wanderings through this world of care,  
 In all my griefs - and God has given my share -  
 I still had hopes, my latest hours to crown,  
 Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down;  
 To husband out life's taper at the close,  
 And keep the flame from wasting, by repose:  
 I still had hopes, for pride attends us still,  
 Amidst the swains to show my book-learn'd skill,  
 Around my fire an evening group to draw,  
 And tell of all I felt and all I saw;

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1. Ibid. Introduction XXV.





And, as a hare, whom hounds and horns pursue,  
 Pants to the place from whence at first she flew,  
 I still had hopes, my long vexations past,  
 Here to return - and die at home at last."<sup>1</sup>

This is the cry of a soul for an escape from sorrow and disappointment; it is a romantic yearning for relief from the harsh realities of life in the simplicity of childhood. Goldsmith has been buffeted about the world and now sought the shelter of home. The contrast between the happiness of his youth and the troubles of his later life was not only apparent but real. Looking back with a perspective of many misspent years he clothed his childhood in a halo of happiness. To him those were golden days. He had always hoped to return to them in old age and enjoy once more their pleasures. All along the vision of this golden age at the close of life was the dream with which he consoled himself for his shortcomings. He longed to end his days in the innocence and simplicity in which they were begun, thus in a measure atoning for past sins. All this goes back, for its psychological basis, to the golden age of the classical poets. The contrast between the real and the ideal, the glamor of ideality leant by distance, the simplicity and happiness of childhood, are all common qualities of the ancient golden age and need only to be mentioned in order to make clear the connection of the classical fable with Goldsmith's vision.

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1. Ibid. Deserted Village, 1.83 ff.



In following through the century the phase of the romantic movement which had to do with the longing for a personal golden age in which to spend the last days of life, it was deemed expedient to ignore the chronological order to the extent of omitting those poets who dealt with the golden age from different points of view. It remains now to consider the other lines along which the idea developed.

It is almost a commonplace that each poet thought himself to be living in the iron age. All the writers realized that society was imperfect and those who longed for perfect happiness found it only in an ideal existence. The ancient poets went in imagination to a condition at the very beginning of time, and called it the golden age. The eighteenth century poets went in imagination and in person to a rural scene of quiet seclusion, patterned after the ancients' golden age, and there found an antidote for a mind and soul poisoned by too much contact with a diseased society. While all the poets realized the defects of the social order, not all of them would flee into solitude to avoid its contaminating influences. There were some who stood in the midst of the evil and pointed to the good. They, too, advocated a return to nature, but it was not merely a return to country life. Wherever society was evil they conceived it to have deviated from the path of nature, for in the state of nature all was good. In pointing out the reforms for the existing evil, they urged a return to natural conditions, to the conditions of the golden age. William Shenstone (1714-1763) was the first poet of



the century to emphasize this phase of the return to nature movement. It was more fully developed by the prose writers of the last half of the century.

In the Epilogue to the Tragedy of Cleone (1737) the poet laments the attitude of the women of his day. He sees them going about in public places, talking freely with everyone, without a vestige of modesty. They ignore the sanctity of the marriage bond and disregard the ties of kinship. Those who are wives studiously avoid motherhood, while mothers hire nurses to care for their children. He deplores this state of affairs but rejoices that it was not always so. In the golden days of the past women were wives and mothers. They found happiness in the home, nursing their own children, enduring the cares as well as enjoying the pleasures of life; they were chaste and faithful. The poet thinks it is possible for these days to come again, largely through the efforts of the women themselves. He pleads with them to

"Reclaim from folly a fantastic age",<sup>1</sup>

by returning to natural conditions. If there is any one in the twentieth century who fails to understand how all this had anything to do with the golden age, he need only to be reminded of a certain movement of his own time. The attempt to bring back so-called "society" women into a true conception of their duties and obligations as wives and mothers, and the campaign against

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1. Poetical Works of William Shenstone. Ed. by Rev. George Gilfillan. Edinburgh, 1854. Epilogue to the Tragedy of Cleone.



divorce, are phases of this movement. The reform advocates painting glowing pictures of the beauty, the happiness, and the sweetness of that home where love and harmony prevail, where the mistress is mother as well as wife, and the children enjoy the fulness of a mother's love. A veritable paradise on earth. It has all the happiness and simplicity, as well as the absence of crime and violence, which characterized the mythical golden age. Such pictures of supreme joy and happiness are evidently connected with the classical golden age. The idea of a life of perfect harmony had its inception in the mythology which created the Reign of Cronus, when men lived without discord, and that time was continually held up as the ideal toward which a wicked society should strive.

The next poet to be considered embodies more of the general characteristics of the golden age than does any writer previously treated, yet there is in his poetry an element of the return to nature not found earlier in the century. Joseph Warton (1722-1800), like his brother, was a conscious romanticist. He recognized the prevailing literary tendency of the century and knew there was an under-current flowing counter to it. He set himself deliberately to aid that counter-current. In the preface to a volume of Odes published in 1746, he says he is attempting, in the Odes, which are fanciful, imaginative, and descriptive, "to bring back poetry into its right channel".<sup>1</sup> We have seen that

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1. Biographical Memoirs of Joseph Warton, to which are added, a selection from his works; etc. Ed. by Rev. John Wool. London, 1806.p.14.





in an age when imagination and fancy were tabooed the golden age was an "exploded fable". Any attempt to reinstate imagination and thus bring poetry into its right channel, would be a step toward giving a new lease of life to the fancy of the golden age.

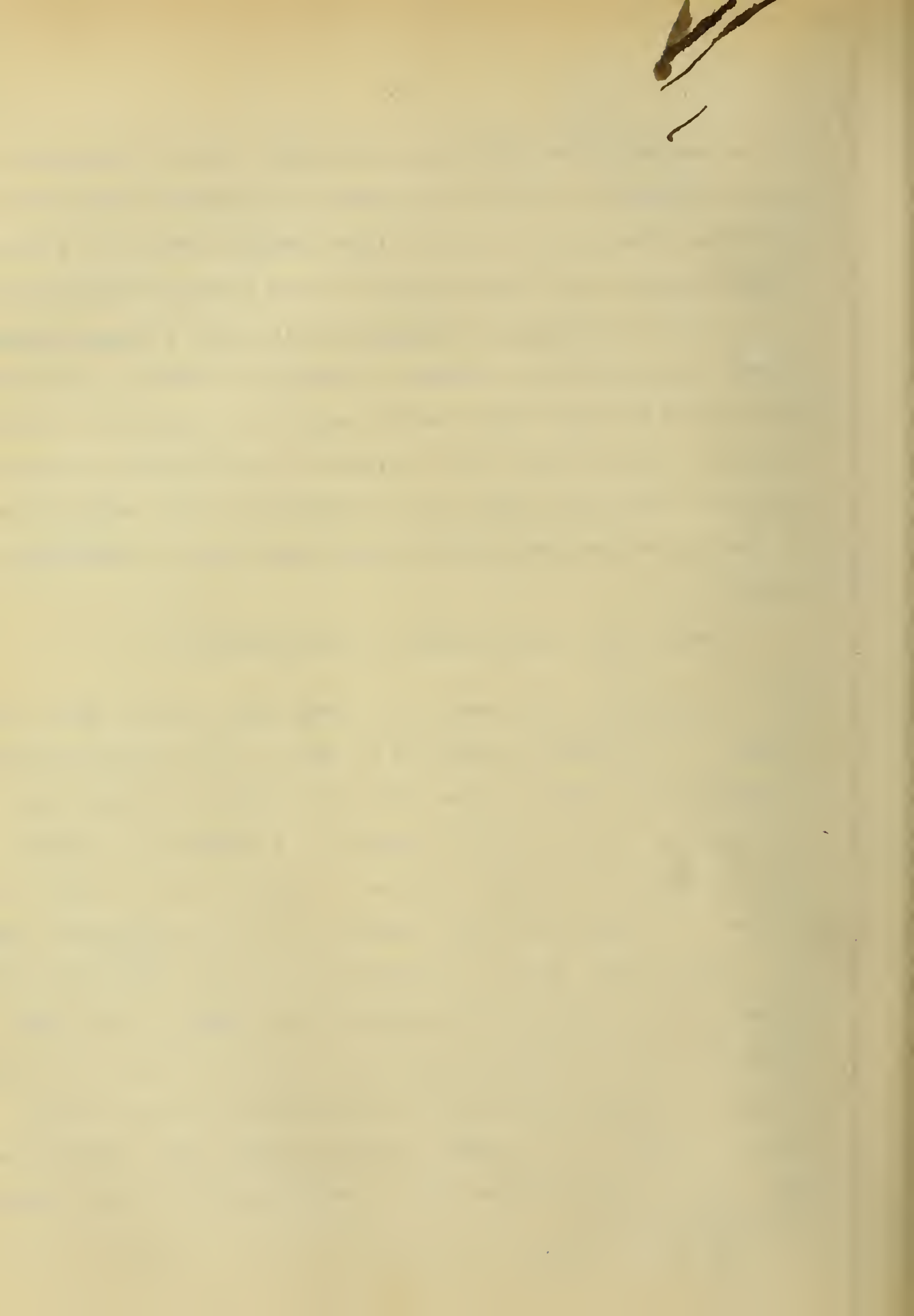
In the Stanzas on taking the air after a long illness, there is a line which strikes the keynote of much of the success of the new movement which Warton helped to inaugurate. The poet has, for a long time, been confined to the sick-room but now he goes out for a short walk and is overjoyed at the sight of nature - beauties which have been so long denied him. He expresses it thus:

"Each rural object charms, so long unseen".<sup>1</sup>

The reading public had been for a long time denied a sight of nature in literature, except as it came in the frigid imitative pastorals of a Pope or a Gay. When the beauty of nature was introduced by its own sincere admirers - a Thomson or a Warton - , a large part of the charm was due to the fact that it was the return of a long-lost love. Because of this the enthusiasm was all the stronger. From an adoration of the city and a total disregard of the country, the pendulum slowly swung to the other extreme - a love of the country and a hatred of the city. The country is always considered as the seat of the golden age, never the city. It is always situated amidst rural beauties and far from the noise of the city. A returning love for the country

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1. Ibid. p.154, stz.4.



made it possible to arouse an interest in the golden age.

The Enthusiast: or the Lover of Nature(1740), is a treatment of nature by a lover of nature, not by a city wit who writes his descriptions from what he sees of nature out of the coffee-house window. The whole poem is pervaded with the sentiment of the golden age, and it is obvious that he draws his inspiration from the ancients. Beginning with line 87 he describes the golden age in a picture which is the exact counterpart of that drawn by Lucretius(Bk.V, ll.922-1008, quoted p. 8, above). City life is the iron age, but the conditions of the classical golden age may be found in eighteenth century rural England. Furthermore, the city is the work of man, but the country is God's architecture. Then why should any one be content to live under the artificial roofs of the city when they might dwell beneath God's great dome of heaven? The reason, so the poet says, is that people do not know the joys of life close to nature. He attempts to bring that knowledge in his poem, and in so doing advocates the return to nature, which means a realization of the life of the golden age.

With Warton the return to nature included the return to country life, to external nature, and to conditions as they existed among the unsophisticated rural inhabitants of the England of his day,- but it went one step farther back than this. The movement from the city to the country had been from culture and refinement to unlearned simplicity. If the ignorant swain living in the country is much happier than the educated man of the city, then the greatest happiness is to be found in conditions



the farthest removed from civilization, viz. savagery. Such a line of reasoning leads directly to Warton's point of view. He conceives the American Indian to be living in the nearest possible approximation to the conditions of the mythological golden age. Since that age was in the very morning of time there could have been nothing for man's use that was not the direct gift of the Creator. The Indian lives in "natural" conditions, as did the people in the Age of Cronus, and is therefore supremely happy.

In the Enthusiast Warton dreams of the "Isles of Innocence" where happiness and quiet sit enthroned as in the fabled golden age. There the Indian wanders in idleness through the groves, with nothing to do but pick the ripe fruits as they hang on the branches about him. He is far from slavery, "cursed power", and the other ills of civilized society, and consequently is happy and peaceful. In the Ode to West the poet has this same fancy of the ideality of the savage life of the Indian. The great difference between actual conditions in America at this time and the poetic fancies of romanticists, is amply attested by the annals of history.

The use of golden age material by James Beattie (1735-1803) is strikingly parallel to that by Joseph Warton. He imitates the ancient classical poets in portraying the mythological golden age, believes his own time to be the iron age, advocates the return to nature, and looks to America to find the conditions of the golden age. All of which may be illustrated by reference to his poems.



The Minstrel (1771) is a poetic voicing of the "back to nature" cry. The hero is tired of city life with its artificiality where wealth is everything, where praise and honor are the goals of ambition, and he longs for the quiet and peace of the country where his soul may commune with nature. In some rural retreat he would live apart from the baleful influences of society and find content for his own mind in quiet contemplation. In the second book there is given a description of the classical golden age. It is pictured as a time of love, innocence and joy, when man received food and shelter by the bounty of Heaven; and it is very evident that the ancient poets furnished the copy for the picture. Indeed, the poet says, it is all a fable, a mythological tale, and the muse of History has never dared "to pierce those hallow'd bowers"<sup>1</sup> for fear it would prick the bubble and the beautiful fancy would vanish. Yet it is real enough to furnish a relief for his weary soul and he finds in the contemplation of the fable a solace for the disappointments of life. He seeks a personal, mental relief in the fancy of the golden age as other poets sought a mental and physical golden age in the country.

In the Ode to Peace, Beattie laments that he is living in the iron age. The Saturnian reign has fled and now murder, bloodshed, and war desolate the land; woe blanches the faces of the people, and "Tyranny's corroding chain"<sup>2</sup> binds them in slavery

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1. Poetical Works of Beattie, Blair, and Falconer. Ed. by Rev. George Gilfillan. Edinburgh, 1854. Minstrel, Bk. II, stz. 39.

2. Ibid. Ode to Peace, I.2.





It is impossible for Peace to dwell in such a land. Since the mythical golden age was succeeded by the iron age and sacred Peace took flight from its sometime home, it has found no resting place among civilized men. But the poet looks wistfully across the waters to the land of promise - America, and wonders if, there where the Indian roves through the primeval shades, tasting the sweet pleasures of uncorrupted nature, Peace has not taken up its abode. He considers the condition of the savage as nearest nature and therefore nearest the golden age. In such a time there could be no strife, disagreement, or war; harmony and peace would prevail everywhere. It was an ideal contrasted with the reality of his own life.

William Cowper(1731-1800) is the last great romantic poet of the eighteenth century. It may be said that he is one of the most important poets of the new movement. With reference to his use of the golden age material he is more comprehensively romantic than any of his contemporaries or predecessors. All the different lines of development of the various phases of the golden age, which have been thus far treated, find expression in his poems. He was so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the golden age that the most of his poems have something of it. The Task(1785) is best representative of the way in which he embodied the different tendencies.

Walking into the forest one morning, the poet and his company come upon a thresher at his work. They see the chaff fly



and hear the regular beat of the flail as he toils at his task,  
and Cowper cries out:

"Come hither, ye that press your beds of down,  
And sleep not; see him sweating o'er his bread,  
Before he eats it.- 'Tis the primal curse,  
But soften'd into mercy; made the pledge  
Of cheerful days, and nights without a groan".<sup>1</sup>

The poet goes on to praise London for its arts and commerce but says the city is not so desirable a place to live as is the abode of this thresher. And why should it be, for

"God made the country, and man made the town".<sup>2</sup>

It is no wonder, then, that health, joy, and happiness are to be found in the country and not in the town. This is Cowper's call for a return to nature. His advice is to leave the unrest and turmoil of the city and find in the country the qualities of the golden age.

The well known lines at the beginning of the second book voice Cowper's outcry against the vices of his age, and his longing to escape to the country to a personal golden age.

"O for a lodge in some vast wilderness,  
Some boundless contiguity of shade,  
Where rumor of oppression and deceit,

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1. Poetical Works of William Cowper. Ed. by Rev. H.F.Cary.  
New York, n.d. vol.II, p.22. Task, Bk.I.

2. Ibid. p.33.



Of unsuccessful or successful war,  
Might never reach me more".<sup>1</sup>

Like the earlier poets who fled from society and took refuge in a rural retreat, Cowper seeks a contrast to the strife and care of life and finds it in sylvan solitude, where, because it is quiet, peaceful, simple, and harmonious, the golden age exists.

In common with all writers of his century, Cowper sighs that he had not lived in the golden age pictured by the ancients. He recounts all the glories of that time and revels in the scene of joy and plenty. But like many another poet, he looked upon the golden age as a fable that had never existed save in imagination. Yet he looks to the future and sees another golden age coming for mankind, a veritable earthly paradise. It is a prophetic dream with which, in the light of subsequent developments, it is very fitting to close the study of the eighteenth century poets. Cowper draws from the prophecies of Isaiah, the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil, and the mythological golden age for the substance of his vision. It is notably similar to Virgil's famous *Pollio*, in all particulars but one, and that is time. The ancient saw the golden age in the immediate future; the modern, taught by the experience of unfulfilled prophecies and blasted visions, placed it in the far distant future. However, it is surely coming, and its approach will be heralded by auspicious portents. There shall be a great abundance of fruit over all the earth; the seasons shall be merged into one eternal spring; the lion and

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1. Ibid. p.37, Bk.II.



bear shall range with the lamb; the mother shall watch her babe play with the serpent and be not afraid; truth, wisdom, and equity shall be supreme.

"Thus heavenward all things tend. For all were once Perfect, and all must be at length restored."<sup>1</sup>

Any study of the romantic movement in England in the eighteenth century will reveal points of contact with the idea of the golden age among the ancients. Especially is this to be noted when romantic literature is to be considered as the literature of escape. One of the earliest motives for writing of the golden age was that it furnished a means of escape from existing conflict to ideal peace. When the classical fancy was taken up by modern poets this motive very naturally became the "return to nature" movement. To return to nature was at the outset, to find new expression for imagination, fancy, and all the natural passions and emotions which had been repressed by the conventional formalism of the age of Anne. The revolt against the existing conventions meant a revolt against the city, and in this respect the return to nature became a return to the country - that is, on the one hand, to simple rural conditions, and on the other, to a social order that was free from the conventions introduced through civilization.

Although the golden age is an important phase of the romantic movement its influence is not confined to a single channel flowing directly through the literature of the century. During

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1. Ibid. p.174, Bk.VI.





the second quarter of the century there sprang up two or three streams, (each representing the development of a certain aspect of the golden age idea) which flowed separately for a time and gained impetus and power as they were augmented by various tributaries. At length they began to flow together and by the end of the century were united into one great river that swept all before it. The early romanticists treated of the golden age from a single point of view, and there were nearly as many points of view as there were writers, but later on, the poets began to embody different phases of the golden age and the return to nature until, by the end of the century, they became so comprehensively romantic as to include nearly all of the various aspects of the idea.



THE NEW POLITICAL GOSPEL.

The revolt against the formality and artificiality of the eighteenth century has been pointed out in the field of poetry. This was a revolt against the conventions of the city life, against the suppression of imagination and fancy, and against the exclusion of nature from poetry. One important phase of its development was the "return to nature", by which was meant a return to the country, to a natural existence, or to the conditions of savage life, but always a return to simplicity. The source of this conception of the state of nature was in the golden age of the classical poets. Its characteristics of happiness and simplicity were transferred from the distant past to the poet's own time or to the immediate future, and associated with the life next to nature. Thus the "return to nature" came to mean a return to the golden age, not a mythological golden age of prehistoric times, but an actual golden age of the present endowed with the characteristics of that mythical age.

The conventionality of the eighteenth century was very widespread, and everywhere there was a feeling of discontent more or less pronounced. Side by side with the literary revolt from artificiality to simplicity existed a political revolt from restraint to freedom. This was the French revolution, which was, among other things, an attempt to realize by force the dream of the golden age, to return to the simplicity and equality of the



state of nature. The significance of the revolution will be rendered more apparent by a glance at political conditions in France at the middle of the century.

Hereditary monarchy was the established form of government. Although the theory of the Divine right of kings had been exploded in England by the revolution of 1688, it still held sway in France. The king could still sum up the whole theory of government in the words of Louis XIV, "L'etat, C'est moi". It is needless to point out the depravity of the court at this time. Beneath its exterior show of refinement, culture, and learning, there was a depravity of morals and a profligacy of life seldom, if ever, equalled in modern history. The two classes of aristocracy and peasantry were very clearly defined and widely separated. The former was associated with luxury and elegance; the latter, with woe and want; the one was the master, the other the slave. The peasants were heavily taxed by the land owners, and levied on for special assessments by the nobility and clergy. As if this were not burden enough they were forced to submit to the Corvee, i.e. the forced service of the peasant in keeping up the public highways - roads mainly for the elegant travel of clergy and nobility. All these abuses were vaguely felt by the lower classes, although they were not clearly defined nor traced to their sources. The people suffered but did not know the cause of their suffering. Their dogged discontent with the existing order of things was daily augmented by the sight of luxury and extravagance among their superiors. This was contrasted with their



own poverty and distress, and they felt the injustice of the artificial distinctions, but beyond this their simple reasoning did not carry them. Their minds were in an unsettled condition and they were ready to follow the first man who should point out a change, for to them any change would seem an improvement.

It was in the midst of this society, nursing religious, political, economical, and social discontents, that Jean Jacques Rousseau(1712-1778), himself a peasant who knew the sufferings of his people, came with a message of salvation. He would lead down-trodden humanity out of want and misery into the happiness and simplicity of the golden age, by doing away with the artificial distinctions of rank, title, and degree, and by abolishing private property and all the institutions that rested for their authority on blind instinct rather than pure reason. This wholesale demolition of the institutions of society would bring mankind to the state of nature, to the condition of primitive man before his natural goodness and purity were sullied by civilization. The state of nature is nowhere clearly defined but in the first two essays - the Discours sur cette question: "Le retablissement des sciences et des arts a-t-il contribue a epurer les moeurs?" (1750), and the Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inegalite parmi les hommes, (1754) - Rousseau's conception of it is given. These essays are mostly destructive, i.e. devoted to an exposure of the evils of civilization and culture, and contrasting civilized man with natural man. Having pointed out





the evil condition of the society in which he lives, Rousseau suggests the remedy in Du Contrat Social, ou principes du droit politique, (1761). The relation of the state of nature to the poetical golden age and its connection with the founding of a new political gospel will be made clear by a brief analysis of these three works.

The Discours sur des sciences et des arts<sup>1</sup> may be epitomized in a short space. Life would be easy and simple if the outward show expressed the inward thought, if decency meant virtue. But virtue rarely goes in grand attire. Riches may proclaim a man's opulence, and elegance may testify to his taste ; but it is beneath the garb of the rustic laborer rather than the finery of the courtier that we must look alike for bodily vigor and purity of heart. Before art had fashioned our manners and taught our passions to speak a borrowed language, our morals were rude, but natural, and differences of behavior revealed at first glance differences of character. Today convention has taken the place of natural impulse. No sincere friendships based on real esteem and confidence are any longer possible, suspicion, fear, hatred, treachery, uncharity, are everywhere concealed under the boasted polish of our time. The reason is that our minds are

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1. The edition used is Petit's Chefs-D'Oeuvre de J.J.Rousseau, Paris, 1864. In giving an analysis of the works in this chapter, I have summarized the main contentions, not attempting to give them in full. I have used no quotation marks. The ideas and often the words are the author's own, I have only endeavored to give what seemed essential to the subject in hand.



corrupted in proportion as our arts and sciences progress towards perfection. Virtue flees before arts and sciences as surely as the tides follow the moon. This is evidenced by history - Egypt, Greece, and Rome tell the same story of tragic downfall induced by the same causes. On the other hand there are a few peoples who have successfully resisted the contagion of knowledge, and are an example to other nations. The early Persians, primitive Germans, Scythians, and Spartans drove away art and artists, science and savants. Dissolution and slavery have been in all time the punishment for our proud efforts to leave the happy ignorance in which Eternal Wisdom placed us. Nature intended to shield us from knowledge, and all the secrets which she hides from us are so many ills from which she would fain guard us. The very origin of the arts and sciences is in evil. Astronomy is born of superstition; eloquence of ambition, of hatred, of flattery, of error; geometry of avarice; physics of a vain curiosity; ethics of pride; one and all they owe their existence to our vices. The taint of their origin clings to them still, for of what good are they save to nourish the vices out of which they sprang? Born in idleness they encourage idleness in others; the luxury to which they lead is fatal to morals; their adherents sneer at religion and try to destroy everything held sacred among men. Knowing all this one cannot but reflect on the simplicity of early times. How beautiful were those times when men lived together in innocence and virtue, desiring the gods to witness their actions! But soon



they became evil, and now the old heroic qualities of courage and hardihood have disappeared, and education has become an elaborate system for teaching children everything they should not know. The meaning of such words as magnanimity, equity, temperance, humanity, and courage is unknown to them. As a result false standards have become universal. Finally the progress of arts and sciences has added nothing to our true happiness, but has corrupted our morals and ruined our taste. Here and there may be found great men like Cicero and Bacon who were at once profound thinkers and useful citizens, but such cases were always and will ever remain rare. For the great masses of men the interests and ambitions of learning will always be harmful. For them virtue is the sublime science and they must be content with that.

The true significance of this Discours lies in the fact that it is an eloquent denunciation of the refinement and sophistication of the writer's own day. This denunciation is logically based on the idea that man was intended by Nature to be good and happy, and that everything added by society and civilization tends to drive him into misery and vice. This is the beginning of Rousseau's state of nature. Like the ancient classical writers and the romantic poets, he contrasts the simplicity and happiness of an imagined first state with the artificiality and misery of his own time. His postulated golden age is one of innocence, equality, and harmony, when man was noble and kind and good as he came from the hands of his Creator;



he was ignorant but happy, unsophisticated but virtuous. Rousseau knew the evil of the iron age in which he lived and attributed it all to the influence of arts and sciences, for in the golden age man was happy because he was ignorant. This became a favorite contrast with him and he never wearied of setting the real man over against the fictitious man, the man of nature against the man of society. This naturally led him into a revolt against the restraints and duties of social life and a glorification of the freedom and self-abandonment of the life of nature. The natural innocence of the mythical first state of man appealed to people in all classes of society. To the peasant it was the voice of a prophet telling him his mode of life was the nearest perfect and all hindrances to his absolute happiness would be removed when those above him should shake off the shackles of society and become simple and ignorant like him; to the gay circles of Paris where vanity, ostentation, and extravagance were ruining virtue and morality, the words of Rousseau came as a trumpet call to a simpler, saner, and more noble life; to the person who who was surfeited with the depravity and impurity of court life and longed for an escape to a purer existence, the sentiments of this treatise were as a drop of water to a soul in purgatory; to all his contemporaries this first work of Rousseau came as a revelation of the evil condition of the society in which they lived, and all came to realize, as they had not realized before, the urgent need of a change toward purer and better things.





Having startled the world with his passionate indictment of society and his reactionary utterances regarding the state of nature, Rousseau carried the same ideas still farther in his second treatise, the Discours sur l'inegalite. It begins with a distinction between the two sorts of inequality among men; the one natural or physical, as differences of age, health, mental power, or bodily vigor; the other moral or political, as differences due to convention and established by the authority of men, as differences of privilege, riches, honor, or power. We are concerned only with the latter class of inequalities. What would men have been had they remained in their original state, and by what process did they reach their present state? In answering this question we will go directly to nature, ignoring the facts, for they have nothing to do with the matter. The point of departure is the natural state of man. This condition probably never did exist and it may never exist, but it is necessary to determine what it would have been if we are to judge correctly of our present life, as this can only be done by comparison to an abstract ideal of existence. Stripping man of all his artificial faculties and considering him as he came from the hands of Nature, we see an animal more strong than some, less agile than others, but, on the whole, organized more advantageously than all; he satisfies his hunger under an oak, quenches his thirst at the first stream, sleeps beneath the same tree that furnished his food, and lo! his needs are satisfied. He lives in the forest with no need of communication with his fellows; he has no house,



no language, and no relationships; he is governed by instinct; the only good he knows is nourishment and repose, the only bad the anguish of hunger. In this first state man was neither moral nor immoral in the present use of those terms, for he knew neither vice nor virtue, good nor bad, and love was only a physical appetite. Along with the principle of self-preservation was that of pity which served to moderate the individual's egoism and work for the conservation of the species. Such being their condition men were safeguarded against progress; thus while the race was old man remained but a child.

Having dwelt upon the primitive condition it is easy to see the differences between the man of nature and the man of society. In the state of nature inequality was a negligible quantity; it remains to show its origin and development from the very beginnings of the social system. The idea of property is the root of all the evil of society. In the state of nature man began to invent simple tools of agriculture and the hunt, and thus began the idea of private possession which prepared the way for the great crime which marked the real beginning of society. The first man who enclosed a piece of ground and said "This is mine", and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. What crimes, wars, murders, misery, and horror would have been saved the human race had some one, pulling up the stakes or filling in the ditch, cried out to the people, "Do not listen to his imposter, you are lost if you



forget that the fruits of the earth belong to all, the earth to none!" But the great champion did not appear, and the usurpation passed unchallenged. Then followed division of land, mining, agriculture, and the other arts, all bringing slavery in their train. With this came inequalities, wealth and poverty, right and wrong, power and weakness. Those who had possession of the land, realizing that it was a precarious and abusive privilege, sought to get others to consent to the new conditions. Because the general state of warfare made the danger to life common to all, they suggested union for the protection of the poor and weak. Such was the origin of society and laws, which gave new power to the rich, new shackles to the poor, destroyed natural liberty, fixed forever the law of property and inequality, and for the profit of a few ambitious people subjected all the human race to labor, servitude and misery. Our present political state is imperfect and will always remain so because it is the work of chance; remedies have been suggested again and again, but they fail to ~~to~~ repair the vices of the constitution. One might recommend without ceasing but it would be useless; the only remedy is to begin, as Lycurgus did at Sparta, by sweeping away everything and building a new structure on natural principles. To conclude, inequality was unknown in the state of nature, it gained force and power with the development of our faculties and the progress of society and became stable and legitimate with the establishment of property and law. It follows then that the inequality of



convention is contrary to natural law whenever it does not correspond with a physical inequality.

In this Discours Rousseau develops more fully the state of nature suggested in his first essay. To him the natural man was simple and happy because he was ignorant; he lived next to nature as his Creator intended that he should. The qualities of the state of nature correspond to those of the golden age - happiness, simplicity, absence of evil or the knowledge of evil, equality, harmony, and "natural" living. Rousseau's conception of natural man, carried to its logical absurdity, would mean a return to the quadruped state and a life with the beasts, but his readers did not think of such things. They saw in the life of the simple savage a contrast to their own conditions, and the picture of the virtue and happiness of that first state made them long to realize those conditions in their own lives. Thus far no one had pointed out the method of return to nature. In the first two papers Rousseau is concerned with the reconstruction of the original man, man as he was in the primitive scheme of Providence, man as he would be if social life and its attendant corruption had not perverted him, and with an arraignment of society with all its ills brought on by civilization. But a regeneration of society would never have taken place as the result of purely destructive argument. Now that the people realized fully the evil condition of society and were eager for a change, they would follow the first light which led to the state of nature. This





light came in the Contrat Social, in which Rousseau approaches conditions from a constructive standpoint.

The Contrat Social begins with a new statement of the old antithesis between the natural man and the man of society. Man is born free, and everywhere he is <sup>in</sup> chains. What forces operate to make this change from natural freedom to political bondage legitimate? Might does not make right. If so, successful resistance to any authority would be legitimate. The social order cannot rest on force, nor does it come from nature, for nature and society are antithetical, therefore it must rest on convention, and that convention is the social compact. At a certain time in his development man reached a stage where he would perish in a state of nature if he did not change his way of life. The problem then, was to find a form of association which would protect the person and property of each individual, and each uniting with all, would obey only himself and remain as free as before. The solution to this problem was furnished by the social contract. All individuals put themselves and their power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and each received the assistance of every other member of the indivisible whole. Thus was formed a body politic with a common will composed of the union of all the members. By entering into it man gives up his natural liberty and gains social and moral liberty. But the social compact does not destroy natural equality, it only balances physical inequality by the equality of convention and law. This is the basis of the



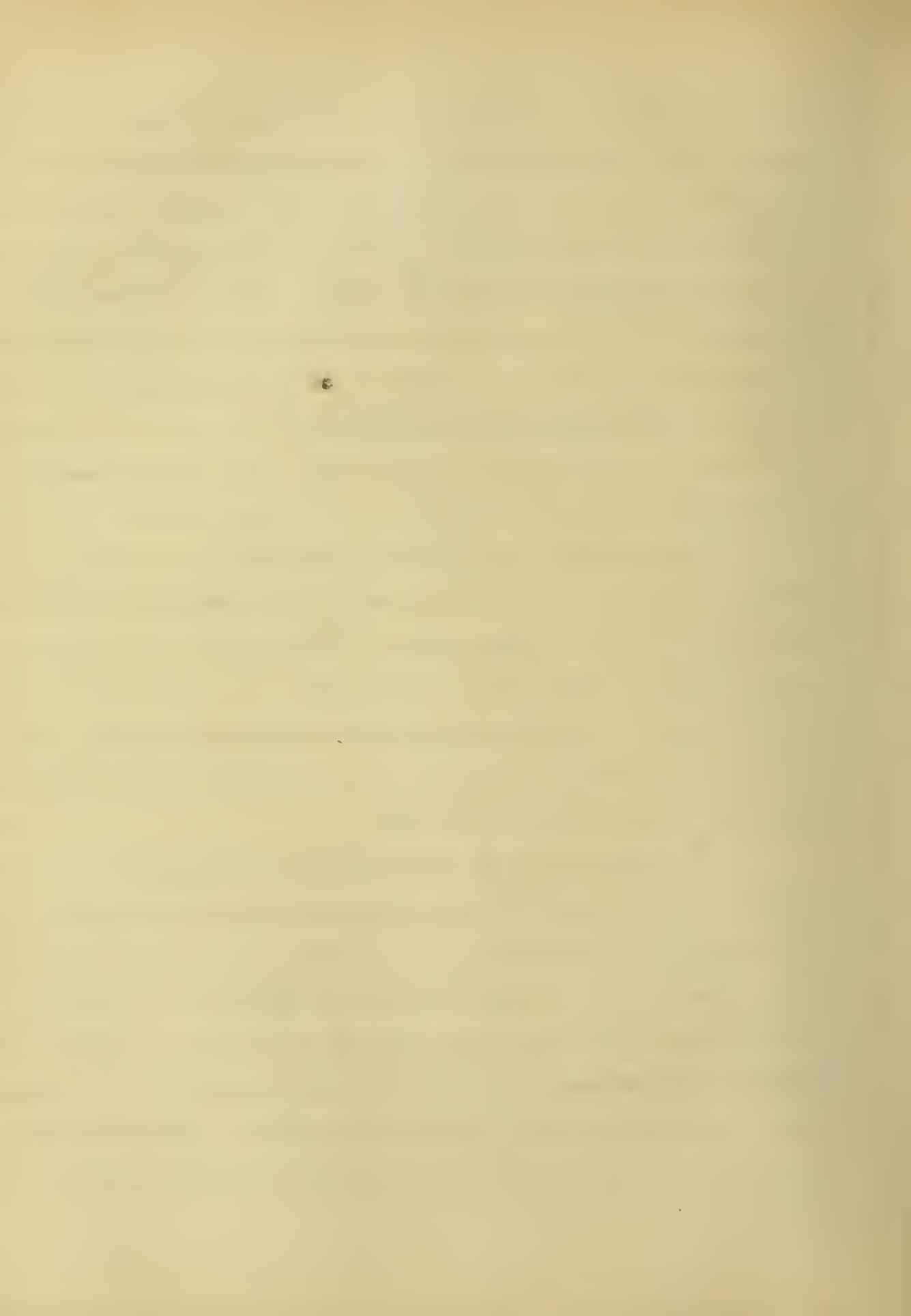
whole social system. The end of every system of legislation should be liberty and equality; because the force of circumstances is ever tending to destroy them, the force of legislation should be ever exerted to maintain them. What is government? It is not the sovereign, i.e. the general will, but an intermediate body (Prince or magistrate) established between sovereign and subjects for their mutual intercourse, and charged with the execution of the laws and the maintenance of liberty. The prince or magistrate is merely an agent of the people and his power is delegated by them. Laws are acts of the general will, and the sovereign is held to confirm such laws as it does not abrogate. Government is instituted by the establishment of law and the execution of it; the depositories of executive power are not the masters of the people but only the officers. The people make no permanent engagement with them; there is but one compact in a state and that is the act of association which alone is exclusive of every other. Yet the people may change the form of government whenever it becomes inimical to the general good, even the social compact may, by mutual agreement, be dissolved. There are three kinds of government - democratic, aristocratic, and monarchical. The first is possible only in a nation of gods, the last inevitably leads to serious abuses, the second is the most preferable. The best government would be founded on the old Roman institutions, not a strictly pure, but a mixed form. It should be based on religion. The sovereign has no right to interfere with the personal belief of any one of its members, but there should be a civil profession



of faith, aside from private creed, determined by the sovereign. The citizens should subscribe to this religion in the interests of public utility, but whoever should dare to say, "Outside this church there is no salvation", should be banished from the state.

The theory of the social compact as the basis of civil association and the justification of government was not original with Rousseau; it is to be found in Hobbes's Leviathan (1651), and Locke's two Treatises on Government (1689), and to these, especially the latter, he was greatly indebted. But even if Rousseau did not originate the idea, he gave it a new lease of life; if he did get it at second-hand, he clothed it with his own imagination and passion; he rescued it from the realm of philosophical discussion, where, but for him, it would have long remained, and carried it into the common speech of every-day life. In a word, he took an idea of special, limited interest and made it so pregnant with vitality and general interest that it exerted an untold influence on political and social conditions.

The Contrat Social followed the two Discours in laying bare the evils of society and drawing the contrast with the primitive first state of man, but it went farther than this - and herein lies its great significance - it suggested a remedy for the evils and a method of attaining the happiness of natural man. By this time Rousseau's ideas had changed somewhat, and a simple return to nature by upsetting the world was no longer considered sufficient. He now reasoned that, since civilization is here, the



best thing to do is to reform society and make it as near the state of nature as possible, i.e. make society so strong that man will be forced to be good and noble as he was in the golden age. Man was by nature just and virtuous but he was corrupted by the evils of society and government. Since government had its inception in the social compact, which was a voluntary association of all the people, it too should be just and equitable. All vices are a result of the abuse of the social compact, and they may be remedied by returning to the first principles of the compact. According to the original convention the people, the citizens of the state, were the real sovereign and should hold the reins of government, in fact they could never be permanently taken away from them. However, they had been appropriated by a certain class and now the people's own right was being used against them to burden and enslave them. The remedy for these evils lay in a reassumption, by the people, of the power which had been temporarily wrested from them.

All these expressions were highly reactionary; they were a blow in the face of custom, an attack upon the established form of government, an exposure of the injustice of social and political inequalities; they were a denunciation of tyranny, property, and privilege, a protest against the unjust distribution of wealth and the enrichment of the few at the expense of many; and they were an assertion of the natural rights, the liberty and equality of men, and a proclamation of the sovereignty of the people and





of popular government. Rousseau's eloquent exploitation of these old principles (though new at this time) was the gust of wind that fanned the smoldering fire of discontent in the hearts of the peasants into a mighty flame that enveloped all the lower classes of France and swept them on to the storming of the Bastille, the massacres of Paris, the execution of the King, and all the bloody events of the revolution. While Rousseau may be exonerated on moral grounds, from aiding the revolution, the historical connection of his work with that epoch-making event is far too evident to be ignored. The revolutionists were enthusiastic Rousseauists, they read and reread his volume, carried it with them into battle, slept on it in the field, knew and loved its teachings and fought to see them realized. The great influence of Rousseau upon the revolution is admirably summed up by Lecky when he says, "the Bible of the French revolution was the Contrat Social of Rousseau"<sup>1</sup>. The result of the revolution was the complete overthrow of monarchy and the subsequent establishment of a republican form of government, a new political gospel based on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The "return to nature" as an offshoot of the golden age of the classical poets has been pointed out. Rousseau's idea of the "state of nature" and its similarity in characteristics to the golden age, has been discussed in connection with the two early Discours. His method of return to nature has been shown in

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1. W.E.H. Lecky, History of England in the 18th Century. 8 vols. New York, 1893-90. vol.V, p.345.



the Contrat Social. The direct historical connection of that work with the French revolution relates it to the change of government from monarchy to democracy, a form under which it is possible for the citizens to live in conditions of happiness and equality approximating those of the state of nature or the golden age. Thus the works of Rousseau become stones in the foundation of the new political gospel, and the Contrat Social the very corner stone of the structure.

More than a decade before the French revolution the new politics was taking shape in America and its principles were embodied in the Declaration of Independence. That memorable document contains some of the ideas advanced by Rousseau, and it is written very much in his spirit. The exact degree of his influence or connection has never been determined. There are those <sup>1</sup> who contend that the author of the Declaration is directly indebted to Rousseau for his ideas, on the other hand there are writers <sup>2</sup> who deny any such relation. If the influence of Rousseau on the American patriots could be established it would give to his writings the distinction of being in the new political gospel in America as well as France. Indeed, that honor may almost be said to come through the influence they exerted on Thomas Paine.

Whatever his foreign influence at the time, Rousseau did a great service for his own countrymen. He pointed out the

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1. The Social Contract, by Jean Jacques Rousseau. Translated by Rose M. Harrington. Introduction by Edward L. Walter. New York, 1893. Introduction LII.
  2. John Morley, Rousseau. 2 vols. New York, 1891. vol. I, p. 3.



differences between real manhood, those qualities with which man is endowed by his Creator, and artificial manhood, those accidental qualities of wealth, position, and birth. This led to a movement to equalize the inequalities, to do away with the artificial and superficial, and to substitute the natural. Great as was the power of his teaching then, it is not yet spent. "The benign influence of Rousseau's writings is still as potent as of old, and the glow of enthusiastic feeling it engenders, is destined to continue and increase in generous minds till the wrongs of society shall be righted, - till the toiler shall receive his due reward, and equal and exact justice shall be rendered to all mankind, - to the humble workman in his cottage, as well as to the proud aristocrat in his palace. - And when at length the increase of knowledge among the toiling millions shall curb forever the unscrupulous power of ecclesiastical tyranny, and restrain the robbery and greed of selfish avarice, the dreams of Rousseau shall be realized, and the gospel of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, become the heritage of all mankind." <sup>1</sup>

It is easy to convict Rousseau of flagrant Utopianism; he was the dreamer of dreams, the seer of visions, the prophet of chimerical schemes of government, and he would have shuddered in horror to see his principles forcibly enacted. However, he could not direct the course of his teachings after they were given out, and <sup>an</sup> attempt was made to realize their ideals. Not

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1. The Social Contract. Also a project for perpetual peace, tr. from the original French. Introduction by Peter Eckler. New York, 1893. Introduction, V.



only did this take place in his native country, but earlier in America, where the champion of the new ideal of government was Thomas Paine(1737-1809). Paine, like Rousseau, was a dreamer, but he was also a man of action, and gloried in the bloodshed that overturned old perverted governments and made possible a new government on natural principles. Like Rousseau, he held the social compact to be the basis of all just governemnt, condemned monarchy and heredity, and urged the people to take into their own hands the reigns of government; unlike Rousseau, he stood in the midst of a great political ferment when the time was ripe for immediate action, and participated in the political reconstruction by his connection with the Declaration of Independence and the Declaration of Rights. Paine wrote numerous papers and essays in support of his theory of the social compact and the rights of man, but an examination of his two chief political works will make clear the relation of the return to nature with the new politics.

The treatise on Common Sense(1776) begins with a distinction between society and government. The one is produced by our wants, the other by our wickedness. Society is always a blessing, but government, even in its best state is but a necessary evil, and in its worst state an intolerable one. Government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence; the palaces of kings are built upon the ruins of the bowers of paradise. To gain a just idea of the end of government it will be necessary to examine its origin. Postulate a small group of men in a state of natural liberty.





For purpose of strength, cooperation, and a thousand other reasons they unite thus forming a society. So long as they remain in the state of nature they will need no laws and no government, but vice soon overtakes them and they need regulations and officers to execute them. Here, then, is the origin of government, a mode rendered necessary by the inability of moral virtue, to rule the world; here, too, is the design and end of government, viz., freedom and equality. The principles of government, growing out of nature, should be simple and natural. In a state of nature all men are created equal, but now we have various distinctions, as rich and poor, king and subject. In those early times there were no wars because there were no kings, the simple happiness of the patriarchs vanishes when we come to the history of Royalty.

Government by kings was instituted by Jews in imitation of the heathen and against the will of God.<sup>1</sup> But to the evil of monarchy was soon added that of hereditary succession. This is contrary to nature, for in the state of nature all men were equal and no one was more qualified to rule than another. Furthermore, if a people should choose one man for king they could not bind their children to serve him or his son. In short, monarchy and succession have laid the world in blood and ashes. To come to conditions in America. England is not our mother country. The new world has been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of liberty from every part of Europe. But granting that we are all the children of England, has she not been a tyrant rather than a mother to us? Reconciliation with her would involve us in heavy taxation and a burdensome

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1. Paine proves this by reference to I Samuel 8.



government. The more prudent course to pursue would be to declare our independence and form a representative government for ourselves. Independence is a single simple line contained within ourselves; reconciliation is a perplexed and complicated matter. Because independence is more simple and natural, it is more to be desired. There are three ways in which it may be effected, and one of the three will sooner or later be the fate of America: by legal voice in Congress, by armed power or by mob. We have it in our power to begin the world over again; the birthday of a new world is at hand, and a race of men, perhaps more numerous than all Europe contains, are to receive their portion of freedom from the events of a few months.

The correspondence of Paine's idea of the origin and development of government with that of Rousseau is plainly evident. Both held that man in the state of nature was good and noble, that the beginning of government was in the social compact, and that all modern political evils are due to violations of that compact; both attacked monarchy and heredity on the ground that it is contrary to nature; and both suggested the return to the original social compact as a remedy for the ills of government. Paine's added interest comes in his practical application of the state of nature to the critical conditions in America. He reasoned that since the social compact was simple and just, the best form of government should be simple and just, and since independence will bring these requirements it is to be preferred



to reconciliation. His buoyant hope in the fulfillment of his prophecy was not far amiss. Common Sense was written in January 1776, and July 4th the Declaration of Independence was signed.

Paine's other political work, the Rights of Man (1791-92), is a direct reply to Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France, (1790). Burke (1729-97) was the champion of political classicism as opposed to Rousseau and Paine, the political romanticists. In the Reflections he defends monarchy and heredity, repudiates the French revolution, ridicules the rights of man, the state of nature, and the social compact, treats with contempt the French constitution and Declaration of Rights, and eulogizes the British government. This vigorous attack upon the new politics was not long unanswered, for Paine immediately took up the cudgels in defense of his favorite principles.

The first part of the Rights of Man is devoted to the various arguments advanced by Burke. While Paine's answers are mainly a repetition of principles hitherto stated, they may be briefly summarized in order to show more clearly the connection of the state of nature with the new political movement. The first attack is against Burke's defense of heredity. There never did nor never can exist a body of people that had the right to bind posterity to the end of time. Every generation must be born free. Although laws made in one generation continue in force through another because they are not repealed, they derive their force from the consent of the living. Under the old form of government



a vast number of people is pushed into the background to make more brilliant the display of a small class of aristocracy. This is contrary to nature and must fall; it was this that brought on the French revolution. That was a bloody conflict, but where did the people learn their barbarity? They had seen the heads of guillotined men struck on spikes about the streets of Paris, and they had become so hardened that they knew how to punish when power fell into their hands. Yet the revolution was a war against principles and not persons. The Bastille was to be either the prize or the prison of the assailants, and the downfall of it included the idea of the downfall of despotism. By such deeds of inhumanity are governments taught humanity. The error of most people who reason from antiquity concerning the rights of man is that they do not go far enough into antiquity. They must not stop one hundred or one thousand years back, but go back to man as he came from the hands of the Creator. And what have we? Man. That is his high and only title. When he forgets this and speaks of birth or family, he becomes dissolute. Man entered society to secure better his natural rights. Every civil right is founded on some natural right preexisting in the individual. When man goes into society he retains those natural rights which he is competent to execute, and gives up those in which the power to execute is imperfect. These rights are focused in society and help to maintain the natural rights of the several members of society. Such is the social compact out of which has risen the only form of





government that can endure, democracy, or the government of reason. The social compact is the basis of the French constitution; all the power rests with the people, there are no titles. In abolishing monarchy with its artificial distinctions of class and power, the people were returning to the simplicity and equality of the beggars; the aged are not in want, the taxes are not oppressive; the rational world is my friend, because I am the friend of its happiness: when these things can be said, then may that country boast of its constitution and its government. Never before was such an opportunity presented to Europe to reform its governments with this end in view. In the western world Freedom has a national in America, in Europe in France. If the right steps be taken all the governments of Europe will be established on a representative basis, animosities and prejudices will be forgotten, and international peace and good will reign supreme.

The Rights of Man is more or less disconnected in Paine's vain attempt to confine himself to Burke's arguments. In the first part the principles are those of Rousseau told over. The distinction between the state of nature and the state of society is emphasized. Man is naturally good but has been perverted by the ills of society. Of these perhaps the greatest is the usurpation of the power of government by the aristocracy. An overthrow of monarchy and an institution of government based on the principles of the social compact would restore man to the happiness of the primeval state. The second part is especially interesting



because of the hope of the future, of universal peace, of world-wide representative government, which is expressed in it. Paine was a thorough-going political romanticist. He believed the salvation of the human race lay in the destruction of existing systems of government and the establishment of a new system based on the principles of nature; he advocated the rights of man because he thought it was a service to future generations; he considered the cause of America as the cause of all mankind; he raised revolutionary discussions to the plane of abstract reasoning and from that height caught a vision of the universal peace of a regenerated race.

By the beginning of the last decade of the century the principles of the new political gospel as expounded by Rousseau and Paine, were pretty widely disseminated and generally known. The American and French revolutions being over and new governments established, there was an opportunity to watch the practical applications of the principles of liberty and equality which had been so earnestly and eloquently defended. But this does not mean that discussion of the new and the old governments had ceased. Far from it. Monarchy still had its ardent supporters and Democracy its advocates. Among the latter was William Godwin (1756-1836), novelist and political philosopher. Like Rousseau and Paine he was an enemy to monarchy and in sympathy with the French revolution. He carried the principles of his illustrious predecessors



into the realm of philosophy. His treatment of those principles is given in the Inquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793).

It begins with the familiar antithesis: man was by nature pure and noble, but he has been corrupted by the vices of civilization. If civilization could be divested of every improper tendency, vice would be driven from the world. This task may be difficult and uncertain, and slow of progress, but hope will never desert it, and no man can render a greater service to his race than to devote his life to the extirpation of the ills of civilization. The usurpations of aristocracy and the corruptions of despotism are never justifiable, because they are all contrary to reason. The distinction between society and government has been well expressed by Paine. Political government must have its sole foundation in the rules of immutable justice; and those rules, uniform in their nature, are equally applicable to the whole human race. The object of political justice is to remove arbitrary distinctions and leave talents and virtue supreme. Justice is the one rule of conduct, and the exercise of reason the mode of ascertaining that rule. Monarchy and aristocracy are absurd, government by the social contract is the only form compatible to reason. Above all we should not forget that government is an evil, an usurpation upon the private judgment and individual conscience of mankind; and that, although we may be obliged to admit it as a necessary evil for the present, it behooves us to admit as little as possible and study whether that little may not be diminished.



Revolutions should originate among the educated because the social reformation that is wanted is complete future reformation. It can scarcely be considered as action; it consists of the gradual education of the race. When the true crisis shall come, not a sword will need to be drawn, not a finger to be lifted up. The adversaries will be too few and too feeble to dare to make a stand against the universal sense of mankind. Nor is that crisis immeasurably distant. The subject of property is the keystone that completes the fabric of political justice. When coercion and punishment and injustice shall be done away with, property will be placed upon an equitable basis. Justice entitles each man to the supply of his animal needs, so far as the general stock will afford it. Luxury is not essential in any society, all property must be common.

It will be seen that Godwin follows Rousseau and Paine in his opposition to monarchy and property, in the distinction between the purity of man in the state of nature and man in society, in his advocacy of a system of government based on the social contract, and in his belief in the ultimate perfection of the human race. Like them, too, Godwin advocates a return to nature, but nature, with him, is synonymous with reason. In the state of nature man was good and noble because he followed the dictates of reason, in the state of society he became corrupt only because he ceased to follow reason. The way to abolish corruption and return to the goodness of natural man, is, therefore, to return to reason. Paine strikes a new note in his idea of the nature of a





revolution. Rousseau did not advocate force, he would have been opposed to it, but it is very probable that the exact method of overturning monarchy and returning to the social contract never took shape in his mind. That was too practical a consideration for his speculative mind. Paine, on the other hand, very earnestly urged the people to assume by force the reigns of government, to fight for the principles of liberty and equality, and to shed the blood of their oppressors in defense of the rights of man. Godwin, just as earnest an advocate of justice and equality, equally conscious of the evils of the present order and burning with a desire to see them righted, puts his trust in reason rather than force. Violence has served its purpose and with the spread of knowledge is becoming more and more remote as a righter of wrongs, but as education becomes general and universal, reason is coming to the front, and we may yet see the day when the dreams of Rousseau, Paine, and Godwin shall be realized through the gradual dissemination of intelligence among all peoples.



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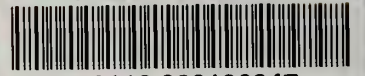
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